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VOL. 33.

HOMO SUM. BY GEORG EBERS.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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# H O M O S U M.

A NOVEL.

BY

GEORG EBERS,

AUTHOR OF "AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS," "UARDA," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

CLARA BELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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LEIPZIG 1878

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# H O M O S U M.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE path of every star is fixed and limited, every plant bears flowers and fruit which in form and colour exactly resemble their kind, and in all the fundamental characteristics of their qualities and dispositions, of their instinctive bent and external impulse, all animals of the same species resemble each other; thus, the hunter who knows the red-deer in his father's forest, may know in every forest on earth how the stag will behave in any given case. The better a genus is fitted for variability in the conformation of its individuals, the higher is the rank it is entitled to hold in the graduated series of creatures capable of development; and it is precisely that wonderful many-sidedness of

his inner life, and of its outward manifestation, which assigns to man his superiority over all other animated beings.

Some few of our qualities and activities can be fitly symbolised in allegorical fashion by animals; thus, courage finds an emblem in the lion gentleness in the dove, but the perfect human form has satisfied a thousand generations, and will satisfy a thousand more, when we desire to reduce the divinity to a sensible image, for, in truth, our heart is as surely capable of comprehending "God in us,"—that is in our feelings—as our intellect is capable of comprehending His outward manifestation in the universe.

Every characteristic of every finite being is to be found again in man, and no characteristic that we can attribute to the Most High is foreign to our own soul, which, in like manner, is infinite and immeasurable, for it can extend its investigating feelers to the very utmost boundary of space and time. Hence, the roads which are open to the soul, are numberless as those of the divinity. Often they seem strange,

but the initiated very well know that these roads are in accordance to fixed laws, and that even the most exceptional emotions of the soul may be traced back to causes which were capable of giving rise to them and to no others.

Blows hurt, disgrace is a burden, and unjust punishment embitters the heart, but Paulus' soul had sought and found a way to which these simple propositions did not apply.

He had been ill-used and condemned, and, though perfectly innocent, ere he left the oasis he was condemned to the severest penance. As soon as the bishop had heard from Petrus of all that had happened in his house, he had sent for Paulus, and as he could answer nothing to the accusation, he had expelled him from his flock—to which the anchorites belonged—forbidden him to visit the church on week-days, and declared that this his sentence should be publicly proclaimed before the assembled congregation of the believers.

And how did this affect Paulus as he climbed the mountain, lonely and proscribed?

A fisherman from the little sea-port of Pharan, who met him half-way and exchanged a greeting with him, thought to himself as he looked after him, "The great grey-beard looks as happy as if he had found a treasure." Then he walked on into the valley with his scaly wares, reminded, as he went, of his son's expression of face when his wife bore him his first little one.

Near the watch-tower at the edge of the defile, a party of anchorites were piling some stones together. They had already heard of the bishop's sentence on Paulus, the sinner, and they gave him no greeting. He observed it and was silent, but when they could no longer see him he laughed to himself and muttered, while he rubbed a weal that the centurion's whip had left upon his back, "If they think that a Gaul's cudgel has a pleasant flavour they are mistaken, however I would not exchange it for a skin of Anthyllan wine; and if they could only know that at least one of the stripes which torments me is due to each one of themselves, they would

be surprised! But away with pride! How they spat on Thee, Jesus my Lord, and who am I, and how mildly have they dealt with me, when I for once have taken on my back another's stripes. Not a drop of blood was drawn! I wish the old man had hit harder!"

He walked cheerfully forward, and his mind recurred to the senator's speech that "he could, if he list, tread him down like a worm," and he laughed again softly, for he was quite aware that he was ten times as strong as Phœbicius, and formerly he had overthrown the braggart Arkesilaos of Kyrene and his cousin, the tall Xenophanes, both at once in the sand of the Palæstra. Then he thought of Hermas, of his sweet dead mother, and of his father, and—which was the most comforting thought of all—of how he had spared the old man this bitter sorrow.

On his path there grew a little plant with a reddish blossom. In years he had never looked at a flower or, at any rate, had never wished to possess one; to-day he stooped down over the

blossom that graced the rock, meaning to pluck it. But he did not carry out his intention, for before he had laid his hand upon it, he reflected:

"To whom could I offer it? And perhaps the flowers themselves rejoice in the light, and in the silent life that is in their roots. How tightly it clings to the rock. Farther away from the road flowers of even greater beauty blow, seen by no mortal eye; they deck themselves in beauty for no one but for their Creator, and because they rejoice in themselves. I too will withdraw from the highways of mankind; let them accuse me! so long as I live at peace with myself and my God I ask nothing of any one. He that abases himself—aye, he that abases himself!—My hour too shall come, and above and beyond this life I shall see them all once more; Petrus and Dorothea, Agapitus and the brethren who now refuse to receive me, and then, when my Saviour himself beckons me to Him, they will see me as I am, and hasten to me and greet me with double kindness."

He looked up, proud and rejoicing as he thought thus, and painted to himself the joys of Paradise, to which this day he had earned an assured claim. He never took longer and swifter steps than when his mind was occupied with such meditations, and when he reached Stephanus' cave he thought the way from the oasis to the heights had been shorter than usual.

He found the sick man in great anxiety, for he had waited until now for his son in vain, and feared that Hermas had met with some accident—or had abandoned him, and fled out into the world. Paulus soothed him with gentle words, and told him of the errand on which he had sent the lad to the farther coast of the sea.

We are never better disposed to be satisfied with even bad news than when we have expected it to be much worse; so Stephanus listened to his friend's explanation quite calmly, and with signs of approval. He could no longer conceal from himself that Hermas was not ripe for the life

of an anchorite, and since he had learned that his unhappy wife—whom he had so long given up for lost—had died a Christian, he found that he could reconcile his thoughts to relinquishing the boy to the world. He had devoted himself and his son to a life of penance, hoping and striving that so Glycera's soul might be snatched from damnation, and now he knew that she herself had earned her title to Heaven.

"When will he come home again?" he asked Paulus.

"In five or six days," was the answer. "Ali, the fisherman—out of whose foot I took a thorn some time since—informed me secretly, as I was going to church yesterday, that the Blemmyes are gathering behind the sulphur-mountains; when they have withdrawn, it will be high time to send Hermas to Alexandria. My brother is still alive, and for my sake he will receive him as a blood-relation, for he too has been baptised."

"He may attend the school of catechumens in the metropolis, and if he—if he—"

"That we shall see," interrupted Paulus. "For the present it comes to this, we must let him go from hence, and leave him to seek out his own way. You fancy that there may be in Heaven a place of glory for such as have never been overcome, and you would fain have seen Hermas among them. It reminds me of the physician of Corinth, who boasted that he was cleverer than any of his colleagues, for that not one of his patients had ever died. And the man was right, for neither man nor beast had ever trusted to his healing arts. Let Hermas try his young strength, and even if he be no priest, but a valiant warrior like his forefathers, even so he may honestly serve God. But it will be a long time before all this comes to pass. So long as he is away I will attend on you—you still have some water in your jar?"

"It has twice been filled for me," said the old man. "The brown shepherdess, who so often waters her goats at our spring, came to me the first thing in the morning and again about two hours ago; she asked after Hermas,

and then offered of her own accord to fetch water for me so long as he was away. She is as timid as a bird, and flew off as soon as she had set down the jug."

"She belongs to Petrus and cannot leave her goats for long," said Paulus. "Now I will go and find you some herbs for a relish; there will be no more wine in the first place. Look me in the face—for how great a sinner now do you take me? Think the very worst of me, and yet perhaps you will hear worse said of me. But here come two men. Stay! one is Hilarion, one of the bishop's Acolytes, and the other is Pachomius the Memphite, who lately came to the mountain. They are coming up here, and the Egyptian is carrying a small jar. I would it might hold some more wine to keep up your strength."

The two friends had not long to remain in ignorance of their visitors' purpose. So soon as they reached Stephanus' cave, both turned their backs on Paulus with conspicuously marked intention; nay the Acolyte signed his brow with

the cross, as if he thought it necessary to protect himself against evil influences.

The Alexandrian understood; he drew back and was silent, while Hilarion explained to the sick man that Paulus was guilty of grave sins, and that, until he had done full penance, he must remain excluded as a rotten sheep from the bishop's flock, as well as interdicted from waiting on a pious Christian.

"We know from Petrus," the speaker went on, "that your son, father, has been sent across the sea, and as you still need waiting on, Agapitus sends you by me his blessing and this strengthening wine; this youth too will stay by you, and provide you with all necessities until Hermas comes home."

With these words he gave the wine-jar to the old man, who looked in astonishment from him to Paulus, who felt indeed cut to the heart when the bishop's messenger turned to him for an instant, and with the cry, "Get thee out from among us!" disappeared.

How many kindly ties, how many services

willingly rendered and affectionately accepted were swept away by these words—but Paulus obeyed at once. He went up to his sick friend, their eyes met and each could see that the eyes of the other were dimmed with tears.

“Paulus!” cried the old man, stretching out both his hands to his departing friend, whom he felt he could forgive whatever his guilt; but the Alexandrian did not take them, but turned away, and, without looking back, hastily went up the mountain to a pathless spot, and then on towards the valley—onwards and still onwards, till he was brought to a pause by the steep declivity of the hollow way which led southwards from the mountains into the oasis.

The sun stood high and it was burning hot. Streaming with sweat and panting for breath he leaned against the glowing porphyry wall behind him, hid his face in his hands and strove to collect himself, to think, to pray—for a long time in vain; for instead of joy in the suffering which he had taken upon himself, the

grief of isolation weighed upon his heart, and the lamentable cry of the old man had left a warning echo in his soul, and roused doubts of the righteousness of a deed, by which even the best and purest had been deceived, and led into injustice towards him. His heart was breaking with anguish and grief, but when at last he returned to the consciousness of his sufferings physical and mental, he began to recover his courage, and even smiled as he murmured to himself,

“It is well, it is well—the more I suffer the more surely shall I find grace. And besides, if the old man had seen Hermas go through what I have experienced it would undoubtedly have killed him. Certainly I wish it could have been done without—without—aye, it is even so—without deceit; even when I was a heathen I was truthful and held a lie, whether in myself or in another, in as deep horror as father Abraham held murder, and yet when the Lord required him, he led his son Isaac to the slaughter. And Moses when he beat the over-

seer—and Elias, and Deborah, and Judith. I have taken upon myself no less than they, but my lie will surely be forgiven me, if it is not reckoned against them that they shed blood."

These and such reflections restored Paulus to equanimity and to satisfaction with his conduct, and he began to consider, whether he should return to his old cave and the neighbourhood of Stephanus, or seek for a new abode. He decided on the latter course; but first he must find fresh water and some sort of nourishment; for his mouth and tongue were quite parched.

Lower down in the valley sprang a brooklet of which he knew, and hard by it grew various herbs and roots, with which he had often allayed his hunger. He followed the declivity to its base, then turning to the left, he crossed a small table land, which was easily accessible from the gorge, but which on the side of the oasis formed a perpendicular cliff many fathoms deep. Between it and the main mass of the mountain

rose numerous single peaks, like a camp of granite tents, or a wildly tossing sea suddenly turned to stone; behind these blocks ran the streamlet, which he found after a short search.

Perfectly refreshed, and with renewed resolve to bear the worst with patience, he returned to the plateau, and from the edge of the precipice he gazed down into the desert gorge that stretched away far below his feet, and in whose deepest and remotest hollow the palm-groves and tamarisk-thickets of the oasis showed as a sharply defined mass of green, like a luxuriant wreath flung upon a bier. The whitewashed roofs of the little town of Pharan shone brightly among the branches and clumps of verdure, and above them all rose the new church, which he was now forbidden to enter. For a moment the thought was keenly painful that he was excluded from the devotions of the community, from the Lord's supper and from congregational prayer, but then he asked, was not every block of stone on the mountain an altar—was not the blue sky above a thousand times wider,

and more splendid than the mightiest dome raised by the hand of man, not even excepting the vaulted roof of the Serapeum at Alexandria, and he remembered the "Amen" of the stones, that had rung out after the preaching of the blind man. By this time he had quite recovered himself, and he went towards the cliff in order to find a cavern that he knew of, and that was empty—for its grey-headed inhabitant had died some weeks since. "Verily," thought he, "it seems to me that I am by no means weighed down by the burden of my disgrace, but, on the contrary, lifted up. Here at least I need not cast down my eyes, for I am alone with my God, and in his presence I feel I need not be ashamed."

Thus meditating, he pressed on through a narrow space, which divided two huge masses of porphyry, but suddenly he stood still, for he heard the barking of a dog in his immediate neighbourhood, and a few minutes after a greyhound rushed towards him—now indignantly flying at him, and now timidly retreating—

while it carefully held up one leg, which was wrapped in a many-coloured bandage.

Paulus recollected the enquiry which Phœbicius had addressed to the Amalekite as to a greyhound, and he immediately guessed that the Gaul's runaway wife must be not far off. His heart beat more quickly, and although he did not immediately know how he should meet the disloyal wife, he felt himself impelled to go to seek her. Without delay he followed the way by which the dog had come, and soon caught sight of a light garment, which vanished behind the nearest rock, and then behind a farther, and yet a farther one.

At last he came up with the fleeing woman. She was standing at the very edge of a precipice, that rose high and sheer above the abyss—a strange and fearful sight; her long golden hair had got tangled, and waved over her bosom and shoulders, half plaited, half undone. Only one foot was firm on the ground; the other—with its thin sandal all torn by the sharp stones—was stretched out over the abyss, ready

for the next fatal step. At the next instant she might disappear over the cliff, for though with her right hand she held on to a point of rock, Paulus could see that the boulder had no connexion with the rock on which she stood, and rocked to and fro.

She hung over the edge of the chasm like a sleep-walker, or a possessed creature pursued by demons, and at the same time her eyes glistened with such wild madness, and she drew her breath with such feverish rapidity that Paulus, who had come close up to her, involuntarily drew back. He saw that her lips moved, and though he could not understand what she said, he felt that her voiceless utterance was to warn him back.

What should he do? If he hurried forward to save her by a hasty grip, and if this manœuvre failed, she would fling herself irredeemably into the abyss: if he left her to herself, the stone to which she clung would get looser and looser, and as soon as it fell she would certainly fall too. He had once heard

it said, that sleep-walkers always threw themselves down when they heard their names spoken; this statement now recurred to his mind, and he forbore from calling out to her.

Once more the unhappy woman waved him off: his very heart stopped beating, for her movements were wild and vehement, and he could see that the stone which she was holding on by shifted its place. He understood nothing of all the words which she tried to say—for her voice, which only yesterday had been so sweet, to-day was inaudibly hoarse—except the one name “Phœbicius,” and he felt no doubt that she clung to the stone over the abyss, so that, like the mountain-goat when it sees itself surprised by the hunter, she might fling herself into the depth below rather than be taken by her pursuer. Paulus saw in her neither her guilt nor her beauty, but only a child of man trembling on the brink of a fearful danger whom he must save from death at any cost; and the thought that he was at any rate not a spy sent in pursuit of her by her husband, suggested to

him the first words which he found courage to address to the desperate woman. They were simple words enough, but they were spoken in a tone which fully expressed the childlike amiability of his warm heart, and the Alexandrian, who had been brought up in the most approved school of the city of orators, involuntarily uttered his words in the admirably rich and soft chest voice, which he so well knew how to use.

"Be thankful," said he, "poor dear woman—I have found you in a fortunate hour. I am Paulus, Hermas' best friend, and I would willingly serve you in your sore need. No danger is now threatening you, for Phœbicius is seeking you on a wrong road, you may trust me. Look at me! I do not look as if I could betray a poor erring woman. But you are standing on a spot, where I would rather see my enemy than you; lay your hand confidently in mine—it is no longer white and slender, but it is strong and honest—grant me this request and you will never rue it! See, place your foot here,

and take care how you leave go of the rock there. You know not how suspiciously it shook its head over your strange confidence in it. Take care! there—your support has rolled over into the abyss; how it crashes and splits. It has reached the bottom, smashed into a thousand pieces, and I am thankful that you preferred to follow me rather than that false support." While Paulus was speaking he had gone up to Sirona, as a girl whose bird has escaped from its cage, and who creeps up to it with timid care in the hope of recapturing it; he offered her his hand, and as soon as he felt hers in his grasp, he had carefully rescued her from her fearful position, and had led her down to a secure footing on the plateau. So long as she followed him unresistingly he led her on towards the mountain—without aim or fixed destination—but away, away from the abyss.

She paused by a square block of diorite, and Paulus, who had not failed to observe how heavy her steps were, desired her to sit down; he pushed up a flag of stone, which he propped

with smaller ones, so that Sirona might not lack a support for her weary back. When he had accomplished this, Sirona leaned back against the stone, and something of dawning satisfaction was audible in the soft sigh, which was the first sound that had escaped her tightly closed lips since her rescue. Paulus smiled at her encouragingly, and said, "Now rest a little, I see what you want; one cannot defy the heat of the sun for a whole day with impunity."

Sirona nodded, pointed to her mouth, and implored wearily and very softly for "Water, a little water."

Paulus struck his hand against his forehead, and cried eagerly, "Directly—I will bring you a fresh draught. In a few minutes I will be back again."

Sirona looked after him as he hastened away. Her gaze became more and more staring and glazed, and she felt as if the rock, on which she was sitting, were changing into the ship which had brought her from Massilia to Ostia. Every heaving motion of the vessel, which had made

her so giddy as it danced over the shifting waves, she now distinctly felt again, and at last it seemed as if a whirl-pool had seized the ship, and was whirling it round faster and faster in a circle. She closed her eyes, felt vaguely and in vain in the air for some holdfast, her head fell powerless on one side, and before her cheek sank upon her shoulder she uttered one feeble cry of distress, for she felt as if all her limbs were dropping from her body, as leaves in autumn fall from the boughs, and she fell back unconscious on the stony couch which Paulus had constructed for her.

It was the first swoon that Sirona, with her sound physical and mental powers, had ever experienced; but the strongest of her sex would have been overcome by the excitement, the efforts, the privations, and the sufferings which had that day befallen the unfortunate fair one.

At first she had fled without any plan out into the night and up the mountain; the moon lighted her on her way, and for fully an hour she continued her upward road without any

rest. Then she heard the voices of travellers who were coming towards her, and she left the beaten road and tried to get away from them, for she feared that her grey-hound, which she still carried on her arm, would betray her by barking, or if they heard it whining, and saw it limp. At last she had sunk down on a stone, and had reflected on all the events of the last few hours, and on what she had to do next. She could look back dreamily on the past, and build castles in the air in a blue-skied future—this was easy enough; but she did not find it easy to reflect with due deliberation, and to think in earnest. Only one thing was perfectly clear to her: she would rather starve and die of thirst, and shame, and misery—nay, she would rather be the instrument of her own death, than return to her husband. She knew that she must in the first instance expect ill-usage, scorn, and imprisonment in a dark room at the Gaul's hands; but all that seemed to her far more endurable than the tenderness with which he from time to time approached her. When she thought

of that, she shuddered and clenched her white teeth, and doubled her fists so tightly that her nails cut the flesh.

But what was she to do? If Hermas were to meet her? And yet what help could she look for from him, for what was he but a mere lad, and the thought of linking her life to his, if only for a day, appeared to her foolish and ridiculous.

Certainly she felt no inclination to repent or to blame herself; still it had been a great folly on her part to call him into the house for the sake of amusing herself with him.

Then she recollected the severe punishment she had once suffered, because, when she was still quite little, and without meaning any harm, she had taken her father's water clock to pieces, and had spoiled it.

She felt that she was very superior to Hermas, and her position was now too grave a one for her to feel inclined to play any more. She thought indeed of Petrus and Dorothea, but she

could only reach them by going back to the oasis, and then she feared to be discovered by Phœbicius.

If Polykarp now could only meet her on his way back from Raïthu; but the road she had just quitted did not lead from thence, but to the gate-way that lay more to the southwards.

The Senator's son loved her—of that she was sure, for no one else had ever looked into her eyes with such deep delight, or such tender affection; and he was no inexperienced boy, but a right earnest man, whose busy and useful life now appeared to her in a quite different light to that in which she had seen it formerly. How willingly now would she have allowed herself to be supported and guided by Polykarp! But how could she reach him? No—even from him there was nothing to be expected; she must rely upon her own strength, and she decided that so soon as the morning should blush, and the sun begin to mount in the cloudless sky, she would keep herself concealed during the day, among the mountains, and then

as evening came on, she would go down to the sea, and endeavour to get on board a vessel to Klysma and thence reach Alexandria. She wore a ring with a finely cut onyx on her finger, elegant ear-rings in her ears, and on her left arm a bracelet. These jewels were of virgin gold, and besides these she had with her a few silver coins and one large gold piece, that her father had given her as token out of his sma'l store, when she had quitted him for Rome, and that she had hitherto preserved as carefully as if it were a talisman.

She pressed the token, which was sewn into a little bag, to her lips, and thought of her paternal home, and her brothers and sisters.

Meanwhile the sun mounted higher and higher: she wandered from rock to rock in search of a shady spot and a spring of water, but none was to be found, and she was tormented with violent thirst and aching hunger. By mid-day the strips of shade too had vanished, where she had found shelter from the rays of the sun, which now beat down unmercifully on

her unprotected head. Her forehead and neck began to tingle violently, and she fled before the burning beams like a soldier before the shafts of his pursuer. Behind the rocks which hemmed in the plateau on which Paulus met her, at last, when she was quite exhausted, she found a shady resting-place. The grey-hound lay panting in her lap, and held up its broken paw, which she had carefully bound up in the morning when she had first sat down to rest, with a strip of stuff that she had torn with the help of her teeth from her under-garment. She now bound it up afresh, and nursed the little creature, caressing it like an infant. The dog was as wretched and suffering as herself, and besides it was the only being that, in spite of her helplessness, she could cherish and be dear to. But ere long she lost the power even to speak caressing words or to stir a hand to stroke the dog. It slipped off her lap and limped away, while she sat staring blankly before her, and at last forgot her sufferings in an uneasy slumber, till she was roused by lambe's

barking and the Alexandrian's foot-step. Almost half-dead, her mouth parched and her brain on fire, while her thoughts whirled in confusion, she believed that Phœbicius had found her track, and was come to seize her. She had already noted the deep precipice to the edge of which she now fled, fully resolved to fling herself over into the depths below, rather than to surrender herself prisoner.

Paulus had rescued her from the fall, but now—as he came up to her with two pieces of stone which were slightly hollowed, so that he had been able to bring some fresh water in them, and which he held level with great difficulty, walking with the ~~greatest~~ <sup>greatest</sup> care—he thought that inexorable death ~~had~~ only too soon returned to claim the victim he had snatched from him, for Sirona's head hung down upon her breast, her face was sunk towards her lap, and at the back of her head, where her abundant hair parted into two flowing tresses, Paulus observed on the snowy neck of the insensible woman a red spot which the sun must have burnt there.

His whole soul was full of compassion for the young, fair, and unhappy creature, and, while he took hold of her chin, which had sunk on her bosom, lifted her white face, and moistened her forehead and lips with water, he softly prayed for her salvation.

The shallow cavity of the stones only offered room for a very small quantity of the refreshing moisture, and so he was obliged to return several times to the spring. While he was away the dog remained by his mistress, and would now lick her hand, now put his sharp little nose close up to her mouth, and examine her with an anxious expression, as if to ascertain her state of health.

When Paulus had gone the first time to fetch some water for Sirona he had found the dog by the side of the spring, and he could not help thinking, "The unreasoning brute has found the water without a guide while his mistress is dying of thirst. Which is the wiser—the man or the brute?" The little dog on his part strove to merit the anchorite's good feelings

towards him, for, though at first he had barked at him, he now was very friendly to him, and looked him in the face from time to time as though to ask, "Do you think she will recover?"

Paulus was fond of animals, and understood the little dog's language. When Sirona's lips began to move and to recover their rosy colour, he stroked Iambe's smooth sharp head, and said, as he held a leaf that he had curled up to hold some water to Sirona's lips, "Look, little fellow, how she begins to enjoy it! A little more of this, and again a little more. She smacks her lips as if I were giving her sweet Falernian. I will go and fill the stone again; you stop here with her, I shall be back again directly, but before I return she will have opened her eyes; you are pleasanter to look upon than a shaggy old grey-beard, and she will be better pleased to see you than me when she awakes." Paulus' prognosis was justified, for when he returned to Sirona with a fresh supply of water she was sitting upright, rubbed

her open eyes, stretched her limbs, clasped the grey-hound in both arms, and burst into a violent flood of tears.

The Alexandrian stood aside motionless, so as not to disturb her, thinking to himself,

"These tears will wash away a large part of her suffering from her soul."

When at last she was calmer, and began to dry her eyes, he went up to her, offered her the stone cup of water, and spoke to her kindly. She drank with eager satisfaction, and ate the last bit of bread that he could find in the pocket of his garment, soaking it in the water. She thanked him with the childlike sweetness that was peculiar to her, and then tried to rise, and willingly allowed him to support her. She was still very weary, and her head ached, but she could stand and walk.

As soon as Paulus had satisfied himself that she had no symptoms of fever, he said, "Now, for to-day, you want nothing more but a warm mess of food, and a bed sheltered from the night-chill; I will provide both. You sit down

here; the rocks are already throwing long shadows, and before the sun disappears behind the mountain I will return. While I am away, your four-footed companion here will while away the time."

He hastened down to the spring with quick steps; close to it was the abandoned cave which he had counted on inhabiting instead of his former dwelling. He found it after a short search, and in it, to his great joy, a well preserved bed of dried plants, which he soon shook up and relaid, a hearth, and wood proper for producing fire by friction, a water-jar, and in a cellar-like hole, whose opening was covered with stones and so concealed from any but a practised eye, there were several cakes of hard bread, and one or two pots. In one of these were some good dates, in another gleaned some white meal, a third was half full of sesame-oil, and a fourth held some salt.

"How lucky it is," muttered the anchorite, as he quitted the cave, "that the old anchorite was such a glutton."

By the time he returned to Sirona, the sun was going down.

There was something in the nature and demeanour of Paulus, which made all distrust of him impossible, and Sirona was ready to follow him, but she felt so weak that she could scarcely support herself on her feet.

"I feel," she said, "as if I were a little child, and must begin again to learn to walk."

"Then let me be your nurse. I knew a Spartan dame once, who had a beard almost as rough as mine. Lean confidently on me, and before we go down the slope, we will go up and down the level here two or three times." She took his arm, and he led her slowly up and down.

It vividly recalled a picture of the days of his youth, and he remembered a day when his sister, who was recovering from a severe attack of fever, was first allowed to go out into the open air. She had gone out, clinging to his arm into the peristyle of his father's house; as he walked backwards and forwards with poor,

weary, abandoned Sirona, his neglected figure seemed by degrees to assume the noble aspect of a high-born Greek; and instead of the rough, rocky soil, he felt as if he were treading the beautiful mosaic pavement of his father's court. Paulus was Menander again, and if there was little in the presence of the recluse, which could recall his identity with the old man he had trodden down, the despised anchorite felt, while the expelled and sinful woman leaned on his arm, the same proud sense of succouring a woman, as when he was the most distinguished youth of a metropolis, and when he had led forward the master's much courted daughter in the midst of a shouting troop of slaves.

Sirona had to remind Paulus that night was coming on, and was startled, when the hermit removed her hand from his arm with ungentle haste, and called to her to follow him with a roughness that was quite new to him. She obeyed, and wherever it was necessary to climb over the rocks, he supported and lifted her, but he only spoke when she addressed him.

When they had reached their destination, he showed her the bed, and begged her to keep awake, till he should have prepared a dish of warm food for her, and he shortly brought her a simple supper, and wished her a good night's rest, after she had taken it.

Sirona shared the bread and the salted meal-porridge with her dog, and then lay down on the couch, where she sank at once into a deep, dreamless sleep, while Paulus passed the night sitting by the hearth.

He strove to banish sleep by constant prayer, but fatigue frequently overcame him, and he could not help thinking of the Gaulish lady, and of the many things, which if only he were still the rich Menander, he would procure in Alexandria for her and for her comfort. Not one prayer could he bring to its due conclusion, for either his eyes closed before he came to the "Amen," or else worldly images crowded round him, and forced him to begin his devotions again from the beginning, when he had succeeded in recollecting himself. In this half-

somnolent state he obtained not one moment of inward collectedness, of quiet reflection; not even when he gazed up at the starry heavens, or looked down on the oasis, veiled in night, where many others like himself were deserted by sleep. Which of the citizens could it be that was watching by that light which he saw glimmering down there in unwonted brightness?—till he himself, overpowered by fatigue, fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER II.

THE light in the town, which had attracted Paulus, was in Petrus' house, and burnt in Polykarp's room, which formed the whole of a small upper-story, which the Senator had constructed for his son over the northern portion of the spacious flat roof of the main building.

The young man had arrived about noon with the slaves he had just procured, had learned all that had happened in his absence, and had silently withdrawn into his own room after supper was ended. Here he still lingered over his work.

A bed, a table on and under which lay a multitude of wax-tablets, papyrus-rolls, metal-points, and writing-reeds, with a small bench, on which stood a water-jar and basin, composed the furniture of this room; on its white-

washed walls hung several admirable carvings in relief, and figures of men and animals stood near them in long rows. In one corner, near a stone water-jar, lay a large, damp-shining mass of clay.

Three lamps fastened to stands abundantly lighted this work-room, but chiefly a figure standing on a high trestle, which Polykarp's fingers were industriously moulding.

Phœbicius had called the young sculptor a fop, and not altogether unjustly, for he loved to be well dressed, and was choice as to the cut and colour of his simple garments, and he rarely neglected to arrange his abundant hair with care, and to anoint it well; and yet it was almost indifferent to him, whether his appearance pleased other people or no, but he knew nothing nobler than the human form, and an instinct, which he did not attempt to check, impelled him to keep his own person as nice as he liked to see that of his neighbour.

Now, at this hour of the night, he wore only a shirt of white woolien stuff, with a deep red

border. His locks, usually so well-kept, seemed to stand out from his head separately, and instead of smoothing and confining them, he added to their wild disorder, for, as he worked, he frequently passed his hand through them with a hasty movement. A bat, attracted by the bright light, flew in at the open window—which was screened only at the bottom by a dark curtain—and fluttered round the ceiling; but he did not observe it, for his work absorbed his whole soul and mind. In this eager and passionate occupation, in which every nerve and vein in his being seemed to bear a part, no cry for help would have struck his ear—even a flame breaking out close to him would not have caught his eye. His cheeks glowed, a fine dew of glistening sweat covered his brow, and his very gaze seemed to become more and more firmly riveted to the sculpture as it took form under his hand. Now and again he stepped back from it, and leaned backwards from his hips, raising his hands to the level of his temples, as if to narrow the field of vision; then

he went up to the model, and clutched the plastic mass of clay, as though it were the flesh of his enemy.

He was now at work on the flowing hair of the figure before him, which had already taken the outline of a female head, and he flung the bits of clay, which he removed from the back of it into the ground, as violently as though he were casting them at an antagonist at his feet. Again his finger-tips and modelling-tool were busy with the mouth, nose, cheeks, and eyes, and his own eyes took a softer expression, which gradually grew to be a gaze of extatic delight, as the features he was moulding began to agree more and more with the image, which at this time excluded every other from his imagination.

At last, with glowing cheeks, he had finished rounding the soft form of the shoulders, and drew back once more to contemplate the effect of the completed work; a cold shiver seized him, and he felt himself impelled to lift it up, and dash it to the ground with all his force. But he soon had mastered this stormy excite-

ment, he pushed his hand through his hair again and again, and posted himself, with a melancholy smile and with folded hands, in front of his creation; sunk deeper and deeper in his contemplation of it, he did not observe that the door behind him was opened, although the flame of his lamps flickered in the draught, and that his mother had entered the work-room, and by no means endeavoured to approach him unheard, or to surprise him. In her anxiety for her darling, who had gone through so many bitter experiences during the past day, she had not been able to sleep. Polykarp's room lay above her bed-room, and when his steps over head betrayed that, though it was now near morning, he had not yet gone to rest, she had risen from her bed without waking Petrus, who seemed to be sleeping. She obeyed her motherly impulse to encourage Polykarp with some loving words, and climbing up the narrow stair that led to the roof, she went into his room. Surprised, irresolute, and speechless she stood for some time behind the young man,

and looked at the strongly illuminated and beautiful features of the newly formed bust, which was only too like its well-known prototype. At last she laid her hand on her son's shoulder, and spoke his name.

Polykarp stepped back, and looked at his mother in bewilderment, like a man roused from sleep; but she interrupted the stammering speech with which he tried to greet her, by saying, gravely and not without severity, as she pointed to the statue,

"What does this mean?"

"What should it mean, mother?" answered Polykarp in a low tone, and shaking his head sadly. "Ask me no more at present, for if you gave me no rest, and even if I tried to explain to you how to-day--this very day--I have felt impelled and driven to make this woman's image, still you could not understand me--no, nor any one else."

"God forbid that I should ever understand it!" cried Dorothea. "'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife,' was the commandment of the

Lord on this mountain. And you? You think I could not understand you? Who should understand you then, if not your mother? This I certainly do not comprehend, that a son of Petrus and of mine should have thrown all the teaching and the example of his parents so utterly to the wind. But what you are aiming at with this statue, it seems to me is not hard to guess. As the forbidden fruit hangs too high for you, you degrade your art, and make to yourself an image that resembles her according to your taste. Simply and plainly it comes to this; as you can no longer see the Gaul's wife in her own person, and yet cannot exist without the sweet presence of the fair one, you make a portrait of clay to make love to, and you will carry on idolatry before it, as once the Jews did before the golden calf and the brazen serpent."

Polykarp submitted to his mother's angry blame in silence, but in painful emotion. Dorothea had never before spoken to him thus, and to hear such words from the very lips

which were used to address him with such heart-felt tenderness, gave him unspeakable pain. Hitherto she had always been inclined to make excuses for his weaknesses and little faults, nay, the zeal with which she had observed and pointed out his merits and performances before strangers as well as before their own family, had often seemed to him embarrassing. And now? She had indeed reason to blame him, for Sirona was the wife of another, she had never even noticed his admiration, and now, they all said, had committed a crime for the sake of a stranger. It must seem both a mad and a sinful thing in the eyes of men that he of all others should sacrifice the best he had—his Art—and how little could Dorothea, who usually endeavoured to understand him, comprehend the overpowering impulse which had driven him to this task.

He loved and honoured his mother with his whole heart, and feeling that she was doing herself an injustice by her false and low estimate of his proceedings, he interrupted her eager discourse, raising his hands imploringly to her.

"No, mother, no!" he exclaimed. "As truly as God is my helper, it is not so. It is true that I have moulded this head, but not to keep it, and to commit the sin of worshipping it, but rather to free myself from the image that stands before my mind's eye by day and by night, in the city and in the desert, whose beauty distracts my mind when I think, and my devotions when I try to pray. To whom is it given to read the soul of man? And is not Sirona's form and face the loveliest image of the Most High? So to represent it, that the whole charm that her presence exercises over me might also be felt by every beholder, is a task that I have set myself ever since her arrival in our house. I had to go back to the capital, and the work I longed to achieve took a clearer form; at every hour I discovered something to change and to improve in the pose of the head, the glance of the eye or the expression of the mouth. But still I lacked courage to put the work in hand, for it seemed too audacious to attempt to give reality to the glorious image in my soul,

by the aid of grey clay and pale cold marble; to reproduce it so that the perfect work should delight the eye of sense, no less than the image enshrined in my breast delights my inward eye. At the same time I was not idle, I gained the prize for the model of the lions, and if I have succeeded with the Good Shepherd blessing the flock, which is for the sarcophagus of Com<sup>te</sup>, and if the master could praise the expression of devoted tenderness in the look of the Redeemer, I know—nay, do not interrupt me, mother, for what I felt was a pure emotion and no sin—I know that it was because I was myself so full of love, that I was enabled to inspire the very stone with love. At last I had no peace, and even without my father's orders I must have returned home; then I saw her again, and found her even more lovely than the image which reigned in my soul. I heard her voice, and her silvery bell-like laughter—and then—and then—. You know very well what I learned yesterday. The unworthy wife of an unworthy husband, the woman Sirona, is gone

from me for ever, and I was striving to drive her image from my soul to annihilate it and dissipate it—but in vain! and by degrees a wonderful stress of creative power came upon me. I hastily placed the lamps, took the clay in my hand, and feature by feature I brought forth with bitter joy the image that is deeply hewn in my heart, believing that thus I might be released from the spell. There is the fruit which was ripened in my heart, but there, where it so long has dwelt, I feel a dismal void, and if the husk which so long tenderly enfolded this image were to wither and fall asunder, I should not wonder at it.—To that thing there clings the best part of my life.”

“Enough!” exclaimed Dorothea, interrupting her son who stood before her in great agitation and with trembling lips. “God forbid that that mask there should destroy your life and soul. I suffer nothing impure within my house, and you should not in your heart. That which is evil can never more be fair, and however lovely the face there may look to you, it looks

quite as repulsive to me when I reflect that it probably smiled still more fascinatingly on some strolling beggar. If the Gaul brings her back I will turn her out of my house, and I will destroy her image with my own hands if you do not break it in pieces on the spot."

Dorothea's eyes were swimming in tears as she spoke these words. She had felt with pride and emotion during her son's speech how noble and high-minded he was, and the idea that this rare and precious treasure should be spoilt or perhaps altogether ruined for the sake of a lost woman, drove her to desperation, and filled her motherly heart with indignation.

Firmly resolved to carry out her threat she stepped towards the figure, but Polykarp placed himself in her way, raising his arm imploringly to defend it, and saying, "Not to-day—not yet, mother! I will cover it up, and will not look at it again till to-morrow, but once—only once—I must see it again by sun light."

"So that to-morrow the old madness may

revive in you!" cried Dorothea. "Move out of my way or take the hammer yourself."

"You order it, and you are my mother," said Polykarp.

He slowly went up to the chest in which his tools and instruments lay, and bitter tears ran down his cheeks, as he took his heaviest hammer in his hand.

When the sky has shone for many days in summer-blue, and then suddenly the clouds gather for a storm, when the first silent but fearful flash with its noisy but harmless associate the thunder-clap has terrified the world, a second and third thunder-bolt immediately follow. Since the stormy night of yesterday had broken in on the peaceful, industrious, and monotonous life by the Senator's hearth, many things had happened that had filled him and his wife with fresh anxiety.

In other houses it was nothing remarkable that a slave should run away, but in the Sena-

tor's it was more than twenty years since such a thing had occurred, and yesterday the goat-herd Miriam had disappeared. This was vexatious, but the silent sorrow of his son Polykarp was a greater anxiety to Petrus. It did not please him that the youth, who was usually so vehement, should submit unresistingly and almost indifferently to the Bishop Agapitus, who prohibited his completing his lions. His son's sad gaze, his crushed and broken aspect were still in his mind when at last he went to rest for the night; it was already late, but sleep avoided him even as it had avoided Dorothea. While the mother was thinking of her son's sinful love and the bleeding wound in his young and betrayed heart, the father grieved for Polykarp's baffled hopes of exercising his art on a great work and recalled the saddest, bitterest day of his own youth; for he too had served his apprenticeship under a sculptor in Alexandria, had looked up to the works of the heathen as noble models, and striven to form himself upon them. He had already been permitted by his

master to execute designs of his own, and out of the abundance of subjects which offered themselves, he had chosen to model an Ariadne, waiting and longing for the return of Theseus, as a symbolic image of his own soul awaiting its salvation. How this work had filled his mind! how delightful had the hours of labour seemed to him!—when, suddenly, his stern father had come to the city, had seen his work before it was quite finished, and instead of praising it had scorned it; had abused it as a heathen idol, and had commanded Petrus to return home with him immediately and to remain there, for that his son should be a pious Christian, and a good stone mason withal—not half a heathen, and a maker of false gods.

Petrus had much loved his art, but he offered no resistance to his father's orders; he followed him back to the oasis, there to superintend the work of the slaves who hewed the stone, to measure granite-blocks for sarcophagi and pillars, and to direct the cutting of them.

His father was a man of steel, and he him-

self a lad of iron, and when he saw himself compelled to yield to his father and to leave his master's work-shop, to abandon his cherished and unfinished work and to become an artizan and man of business, he swore never again to take a piece of clay in his hand, or to wield a chisel. And he kept his word even after his father's death; but his creative instincts and love of art continued to live and work in him, and were transmitted to his two sons.

Antonius was a highly gifted artist, and if Polykarp's master was not mistaken, and if he himself were not misled by fatherly affection, his second son was on the high road to the very first rank in art—to a position reached only by elect spirits.

Petrus knew the models for the Good Shepherd and for the lions, and declared to himself that these last were unsurpassable in truth, power, and majesty. How eagerly must the young artist long to execute them in hard stone, and to see them placed in the honoured, though indeed pagan, spot, which was intended

for them. And now the bishop forbade him the work, and the poor fellow might well be feeling just as he himself had felt thirty years ago, when he had been commanded to abandon the immature first-fruits of his labour.

Was the bishop indeed right? This and many other questions agitated the sleepless father, and as soon as he heard that his wife had risen from her bed to go to her son, whose footsteps he too could hear overhead, he got up and followed her.

He found the door of the work-room open, and, himself unseen and unheard, he was witness to his wife's vehement speech, and to the lad's justification, while Polykarp's work stood in the full light of the lamps, exactly in front of him.

His gaze was spell-bound to the mass of clay; he looked and looked, and was not weary of looking, and his soul swelled with the same awe-struck sense of devout admiration that it had experienced, when for the first time, in his early youth, he saw with his own eyes the

works of the great old Athenian masters in the Cæsareum.

And this head was his son's work!

He stood there greatly overcome, his hands clasped together, holding his breath till his mouth was dry, and swallowing his tears to keep them from falling. At the same time he listened with anxious attention, so as not to lose one word of Polykarp's.

"Aye, thus and thus only are great works of art begotten," said he to himself, "and if the Lord had bestowed on me such gifts as on this lad, no father, nay, no god, should have compelled me to leave my Ariadne unfinished. The attitude of the body was not bad I should say—but the head, the face—Aye, the man, who can mould such a likeness as that has his hand and eye guided by the holy spirits of Art. He who has done that head will be praised in the latter days together with the great Athenian masters—and he—yes, he, merciful Heaven! he is my own beloved son!"

A blessed sense of rejoicing, such as he had

not felt since his early youth, filled his heart, and Dorothea's ardour seemed to him half pitiful and half amusing.

It was not till his duteous son took the hammer in his hand, that he stepped between his wife and the bust, saying kindly,

"There will be time enough to-morrow to destroy the work. Forget the model, my son, now that you have taken advantage of it so successfully. I know of a better mistress for you—Art—to whom belongs everything of beauty that the most High has created—Art in all its breadth and fulness, not fettered and narrowed by any Agapitus."

Polykarp flung himself into his father's arms, and the stern man, hardly master of his emotions, kissed the boy's forehead, his eyes, and his cheeks.

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## CHAPTER III.

AT noon of the following day the Senator went to the women's room, and while he was still on the threshold, he asked his wife—who was busy at the loom—

“Where is Polykarp? I did not find him with Antonius, who is working at the placing of the altar, and I thought I might find him here.”

“After going to the church,” said Dorothea, “he went up the mountain. Go down to the work-shops, Marthana, and see, if your brother is come back.”

Her daughter obeyed quickly and gladly, for her brother was to her the dearest, and seemed to her to be the best, of men. As soon as the pair were alone together Petrus said, while he held out his hand to his wife with genial affection, “Well, mother—shake hands.” Dorothea paused for an instant, looking him in

the face, as if to ask him, "Does your pride at last allow you to cease doing me an injustice?" It was a reproach, but in truth not a severe one, or her lips would hardly have trembled so tenderly, as she said,

"You cannot be angry with me any longer, and it is well that all should once more be as it ought."

All certainly had not been "as it ought," for since the husband and wife had met in Polykarp's work-room, they had behaved to each other as if they were strangers. In their bedroom, on the way to church, and at breakfast, they had spoken to each no more than was absolutely necessary, or than was requisite in order to conceal their difference from the servants and children. Up to this time, an understanding had always subsisted between them that had never taken form in words, and yet that had scarcely in a single case been infringed, that neither should ever praise one of their children for anything that the other thought blameworthy, and vice versa.

But in this night, her husband had followed up her severest condemnation by passionately embracing the wrong-doer. Never had she been so stern in any circumstances, while on the other hand her husband, so long as she could remember, had never been so soft-hearted and tender to his son, and yet she had controlled herself so far, as not to contradict Petrus in Polykarp's presence, and to leave the work-room in silence with her husband.

"When we are once alone together in the bed-room," thought she, "I will represent to him his error as I ought, and he will have to answer for himself."

But she did not carry out this purpose, for she felt that something must be passing in her husband's mind that she did not understand; otherwise how could his grave eyes shine so mildly and kindly, and his stern lips smile so affectionately after all that had occurred when he, lamp in hand, had mounted the narrow stair. He had often told her that she could read his soul like an open book, but she did not

conceal from herself that there were certain sides of that complex structure whose meaning she was incapable of comprehending. And strange to say, she ever and again came upon these incomprehensible phases of his soul, when the images of the gods, and the idolatrous temples of the heathen, or when their sons' enterprises and work were the matters in hand. And yet Petrus was the son of a pious Christian; but his grandfather had been a Greek heathen, and hence perhaps a certain something wrought in his blood which tormented her, because she could not reconcile it with Agapitus' doctrine, but which she nevertheless dared not attempt to oppose because her taciturn husband never spoke out with so much cheerfulness and frankness as when he might talk of these things with his sons and their friends, who often accompanied them to the oasis. Certainly, it could be nothing sinful that at this particular moment seemed to light up her husband's face, and restore his youth.

"They just are men," said she to herself,

"and in many things they have the advantage of us women. The old man looks as he did on his wedding-day! Polykarp is the very image of him, as every one says, and now, looking at the father, and recalling to my mind how the boy looked when he told me how he could not refrain from making Sirona's portrait, I must say that I never saw such a likeness in the whole course of my life."

He bid her a friendly good night, and extinguished the lamp. She would willingly have said a loving word to him, for his contented expression touched and comforted her, but that would just then have been too much after what she had gone through in her son's work-room. In former years it had happened pretty often that, when one of them had caused dissatisfaction to the other, and there had been some quarrel between them, they had gone to rest unreconciled, but the older they grew the more rarely did this occur, and it was now a long time since any shadow had fallen on the perfect serenity of their married life.

Three years ago, on the occasion of the

marriage of their eldest son, they had been standing together, looking up at the starry sky, when Petrus had come close up to her, and had said,

“How calmly and peacefully the wanderers up there follow their roads without jostling or touching one another! As I walked home alone from the quarries by their friendly light, I thought of many things. Perhaps there was once a time when the stars rushed wildly about in confusion, crossing each other's path, while many a star flew in pieces at the impact. Then the Lord created man, and love came into the world and filled the Heavens and the earth, and he commanded the stars to be our light by night; then each began to respect the path of the other, and the stars more rarely came into collision till even the smallest and swiftest kept to its own path and its own period, and the shining host above grew to be as harmonious as it is numberless. Love and a common purpose worked this marvel; for he who loves another, will do him no injury, and he who is

bound to perfect a work with the help of another, will not hinder nor delay him. We two have long since found the right road, and if at any time one of us is inclined to cross the path of the other, we are held back by love and by our common duty, namely to shed a pure light on the path of our children."

Dorothea had never forgotten these words, and they came into her mind now again when Petrus held out his hand to her so warmly; as she laid hers in it, she said,

"For the sake of dear peace, well and good—but one thing I cannot leave unsaid. Soft-hearted weakness is not usually your defect, but you will utterly spoil Polykarp."

"Leave him, let us leave him as he is," cried Petrus, kissing his wife's brow. "It is strange how we have exchanged parts! Yesterday you were exhorting me to mildness towards the lad, and to-day—"

"To-day I am severer than you," interrupted Dorothea. "Who, indeed, could guess that an old grey-beard would derogate from the duties

of his office as father and as judge for the sake of a woman's smiling face in clay—as Esau sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage?”

“And to whom would it occur,” asked Petrus, taking up his wife's tone, “that so tender a mother as you would condemn her favourite son, because he laboured to earn peace for his soul by a deed—by a work for which his master might envy him?”

“I have indeed observed,” interrupted Dorothea, “that Sirona's image has bewitched you, and you speak as if the boy had achieved some great miracle. I do not know much about modelling and sculpture, and I will not contradict you, but if the fair-haired creature's face were less pretty, and if Polykarp had not executed any thing remarkable, would it have made the smallest difference in what he has done and felt wrong? Certainly not. But that is just like men, they care only for success.”

“And with perfect justice,” answered Petrus, “if the success is attained, not in mere child's play, but by a severe struggle. ‘To him, that

hath, shall more be given,' says the scripture, and he who has a soul more richly graced than others have—he who is helped by good spirits—he shall be forgiven many things that even a mild judge would be unwilling to pardon in a man of poor gifts, who torments and exerts himself and yet brings nothing to perfection. Be kind to the boy again. Do you know what prospect lies before you through him? You yourself in your life have done much good, and spoken much wisdom, and I, and the children, and the people in this place, will never forget it all. But I can promise you the gratitude of the best and noblest who now live or who will live in centuries to come—for that you are the mother of Polykarp!"

"And people say," cried Dorothea, "that every mother has four eyes for her children's merits. If that is true, then fathers no doubt have ten, and you as many as Argus, of whom the heathen legend speaks— But here comes Polykarp."

Petrus went forward to meet his son, and

gave him his hand, but in quite a different manner to what he had formerly shown; at least it seemed to Dorothea that her husband received the youth, no longer as his father and master, but as a friend greets a friend who is his equal in privileges and judgment. When Polykarp turned to greet her also she coloured all over, for the thought flashed through her mind that her son, when he thought of the past night, must regard her as unjust or foolish; but she soon recovered her own calm equanimity, for Polykarp was the same as ever, and she read in his eyes that he felt towards her the same as yesterday and as ever.

"Love," thought she, "is not extinguished by injustice, as fire is by water. It blazes up brighter or less bright, no doubt, according to the way the wind blows, but it cannot be wholly smothered—least of all by death."

Polykarp had been up the mountain, and Dorothea was quite satisfied when he related what had led him thither. He had long since planned the execution of a statue of Moses,

and when his father had left him, he could not get the tall and dignified figure of the old man out of his mind. He felt that he had found the right model for his work. He must, he would forget—and he knew, that he could only succeed if he found a task which might promise to give some new occupation to his bereaved soul. Still, he had seen the form of the mighty man of God which he proposed to model, only in vague outline before his mind's eye, and he had been prompted to go to a spot whither many pilgrims resorted, and which was known as the Place of Communion, because it was there that the Lord had spoken to Moses. There Polykarp had spent some time, for there, if anywhere—there, where the Law-giver himself had stood, must he find right inspiration.

“And you have accomplished your end?” asked his father.

Polykarp shook his head.

“If you go often enough to the sacred spot, it will come to you,” said Dorothea. “The be-

ginning is always the chief difficulty; only begin at once to model your father's head."

"I have already begun it," replied Polykarp, "but I am still tired from last night."

"You look pale, and have dark lines under your eyes," said Dorothea anxiously. "Go upstairs and lie down to rest. I will follow you and bring you a beaker of old wine."

"That will not hurt him," said Petrus, thinking as he spoke—"A draught of Lethe would serve him even better."

When, an hour later, the Senator sought his son in his work-room, he found him sleeping, and the wine stood untouched on the table. Petrus softly laid his hand on his son's forehead and found it cool and free from fever. Then he went quietly up to the portrait of Sirona, raised the cloth with which it was covered, and stood before it a long time sunk in thought. At last he drew back, covered it up again, and examined the models which stood on a shelf fastened to the wall.

A small female figure particularly fixed his

attention, and he was taking it admiringly in his hand when Polykarp awoke.

"That is the image of the goddess of fate—that is a Tyche," said Petrus.

"Do not be angry with me, father," entreated Polykarp. "You know, the figure of a Tyche is to stand in the hand of the statue of the Cæsar that is intended for the new city of Constantine, and so I have tried to represent the goddess. The drapery and pose of the arms, I think, have succeeded, but I failed in the head."

Petrus, who had listened to him with attention, glanced involuntarily at the head of Sirona, and Polykarp followed his eyes surprised and almost startled.

The father and son had understood each other, and Polykarp said,

"I had already thought of that."

Then he sighed bitterly, and said to himself,

"Yes and verily, she is the goddess of my fate." But he dared not utter this aloud.

But Petrus had heard him sigh, and said, "Let that pass. This head smiles with sweet fascination, and the countenance of the goddess that rules the actions even of the immortals, should be stern and grave."

Polykarp could contain himself no longer.

"Yes, father," he exclaimed. "Fate is terrible—and yet I will represent the goddess with a smiling mouth, for that which is most terrible in her is, that she rules not by stern laws, but smiles while she makes us her sport."

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## CHAPTER IV.

IT was a splendid morning; not a cloud dimmed the sky which spread high above desert, mountain, and oasis, like an arched tent of uniform deep-blue silk. How delicious it is to breathe the pure, light, aromatic air on the heights, before the rays of the sun acquire their mid-day power, and the shadows of the heated porphyry cliffs, growing shorter and shorter, at last wholly disappear!

With what delight did Sirona inhale this pure atmosphere, when after a long night—the fourth that she had passed in the anchorite's dismal cave—she stepped out into the air. Paulus sat by the hearth, and was so busily engaged with some carving, that he did not observe her approach.

“Kind good man!” thought Sirona, as she perceived a steaming pot on the fire, and the

palm-branches which the Alexandrian had fastened up by the entrance to the cave, to screen her from the mounting sun. She knew the way without a guide to the spring from which Paulus had brought her water at their first meeting, and she now slipped away, and went down to it with a pretty little pitcher of burnt clay in her hand. Paulus did indeed see her, but he made as though he neither saw nor heard, for he knew she was going there to wash herself, and to dress and smarten herself as well as might be—for was she not a woman! When she returned, she looked not less fresh and charming than on that morning when she had been seen and watched by Hermas. True, her heart was sore, true, she was perplexed and miserable, but sleep and rest had long since effaced from her healthy, youthful, and elastic frame all traces left by that fearful day of flight; and fate, which often means best by us when it shows us a hostile face, had sent her a minor anxiety to divert her from her graver cares.

Her greyhound was very ill, and it seemed that in the ill-treatment it had experienced, not only its leg had been broken, but that it had suffered some internal injury. The brisk, lively little creature fell down powerless whenever it tried to stand, and when she took it up to nurse it comfortably in her lap, it whined pitifully, and looked up at her sorrowfully, and as if complaining to her. It would take neither food nor drink; its cool little nose was hot; and when she left the cave, Iambe lay panting on the fine woollen coverlet which Paulus had spread upon the bed, unable even to look after her.

Before taking the dog the water she had fetched in the graceful jar—which was another gift from her hospitable friend—she went up to Paulus and greeted him kindly. He looked up from his work, thanked her, and a few minutes later, when she came out of the cave again, asked her, “How is the poor little creature?”

Sirona shrugged her shoulders, and said

sadly, "She has drunk nothing, and does not even know me, and pants as rapidly as last evening—if I were to lose the poor little beast!—"

She could say no more for emotion, but Paulus shook his head.

"It is sinful," he said, "to grieve so for a beast devoid of reason."

"Iambe is not devoid of reason," replied Sirona. "And even if she were, what have I left if she dies? She grew up in my father's house, where all loved me; I had her first when she was only a few days old, and I brought her up on milk on a little bit of sponge. Many a time, when I heard the little thing whining for food, have I got out of bed at night with bare feet; and so she came to cling to me like a child, and could not do without me. No one can know how another feels about such things. My father used to tell us of a spider that beautified the life of a prisoner, and what is a dirty dumb creature like that to my clever, graceful little dog! I have lost my home, and

here every one believes the worst of me, although I have done no one any harm, and no one, no one loves me but Iambe."

"But I know of one who loves every one with a divine and equal love," interrupted Paulus.

"I do not care for such a one," answered Sirona. "Iambe follows no one but me; what good can a love do me that I must share with all the world! But you mean the crucified God of the Christians? He is good and pitiful, so says Dame Dorothea; but he is dead—I cannot see him, nor hear him, and, certainly, I cannot long for one who only shows me grace. I want one to whom I can count for something, and to whose life and happiness I am indispensable."

A scarcely perceptible shudder thrilled through the Alexandrian as she spoke these words, and he thought, as he glanced at her face and figure with a mingled expression of regret and admiration, "Satan, before he fell, was the fairest among the pure spirits, and he

still has power<sup>i</sup> over this woman. She is still far from being ripe for salvation, and yet she has a gentle heart; and even if she has erred, she is not lost."

Sirona's eyes had met his, and she said with a sigh, "You look at me so compassionately—if only Iambe were well, and if I succeeded in reaching Alexandria, my destiny would perhaps take a turn for the better."

Paulus had risen while she spoke, and had taken the pot from the hearth; he now offered it to his guest, saying,

"For the present we will trust to this broth to compensate to you for the delights of the capital; I am glad that you relish it. But tell me now, have you seriously considered what danger may threaten a beautiful, young, and unprotected woman in the wicked city of the Greeks? Would it not be better that you should submit to the consequences of your guilt, and return to Phœbicius, to whom unfortunately you belong?"

Sirona, at these words, had set down the

vessel out of which she was eating, and rising in passionate haste, she exclaimed,

“That shall never, never be!—And when I was sitting up there half dead, and took your step for that of Phœbicius, the gods showed me a way to escape from him, and from you or any one who would drag me back to him. When I fled to the edge of the abyss, I was raving and crazed, but what I then would have done in my madness, I would do now in cold blood—as surely as I hope to see my own people in Arelas once more! What was I once, and to what have I come through Phœbicius! Life was to me a sunny garden with golden trellises and shady trees and waters as bright as crystal, with rosy flowers and singing birds; and he, he has darkened its light, and fouled its springs, and broken down its flowers. All now seems dumb and colourless, and if the abyss is my grave, no one will miss me nor mourn for me.”

“Poor woman!” said Paulus. “Your husband then showed you very little love.”

"Love," laughed Sirona, "Phœbicius and love! Only yesterday I told you, how cruelly he used to torture me after his feasts, when he was drunk or when he recovered from one of his swoons. But one thing he did to me, one thing which broke the last thread of a tie between us. No one yet has ever heard a word of it from me; not even Dorothea, who often blamed me when I let slip a hard word against my husband. It was well for her to talk—if I had found a husband like Petrus I might perhaps have been like Dorothea. It is a marvel, which I myself do not understand, that I did not grow wicked with such a man, a man who—why should I conceal it—who, when we were at Rome, because he was in debt, and because he hoped to get promotion through his legate Quintillus, sold me—me—to him. He himself brought the old man—who had often followed me about—into his house, but our hostess, a good woman, had overheard the matter, and betrayed it all to me. It is so base, so vile—it seems to blacken my soul only to think of it!

The legate got little enough in return for his sesterces, but Phœbicius did not restore his wages of sin, and his rage against me knew no bounds when he was transferred to the oasis at the instigation of his betrayed chief. Now you know all, and never advise me again to return to that man to whom my misfortune has bound me.

“Only listen how the poor little beast in there is whining. It wants to come to me, and has not the strength to move.”

Paulus looked after her sympathetically as she disappeared under the opening in the rock, and he awaited her return with folded arms. He could not see into the cave, for the space in which the bed stood was closed at the end by the narrow passage which formed the entrance, and which joined it at an angle as the handle of a scythe joins the blade. She remained a long time, and he could hear now and then a tender word with which she tried to comfort the suffering creature. Suddenly he was startled by a loud and bitter cry from

Sirona; no doubt, the poor woman's affectionate little companion was dead, and in the dim twilight of the cave she had seen its dulled eye, and felt the stiffness of death overspreading and paralysing its slender limbs. He dared not go into the cavern, but he felt his eyes fill with tears, and he would willingly have spoken some word of consolation to her.

At last she came out, her eyes red with weeping. Paulus had guessed rightly for she held the body of little Iambe in her arms.

"How sorry I am," said Paulus, "the poor little creature was so pretty."

Sirona nodded, sat down, and unfastened the prettily embroidered band from the dog's neck, saying half to herself, and half to Paulus,

"My little Agnes worked this collar. I myself had taught her to sew, and this was the first piece of work that was all her own." She held the collar up to the anchorite. "This clasp is of real silver," she went on, "and my father himself gave it to me. He was fond of the poor

little dog too. Now it will never leap and spring again, poor thing."

She looked sadly down at the dead dog. Then she collected herself, and said hurriedly,

"Now I will go away from here. Nothing—nothing keeps me any longer in this wilderness, for the Senator's house, where I have spent many happy hours, and where everyone was fond of me, is closed against me, and must ever be so long as *he* lives there. If you have not been kind to me only to do me harm in the end, let me go to-day, and help me to reach Alexandria."

"Not to-day, in any case not to-day," replied Paulus. "First I must find out when a vessel sails for Klysma or for Berenike, and then I have many other things to see to for you. You owe me an answer to my question, as to what you expect to do and to find in Alexandria. Poor child—the younger and the fairer you are—"

"I know all you would say to me," interrupted Sirona. "Wherever I have been, I have

attracted the eyes of men, and when I have read in their looks that I pleased them, it has greatly pleased me—why should I deny it? Many a one has spoken fair words to me or given me flowers, and sent old women to my house to win me for them, but even if one has happened to please me better than another, still I have never found it hard to send them home again as was fitting.”

“Till Hermas laid his love at your feet,” said Paulus. “He is a bold lad—”

“A pretty, inexperienced boy,” said Sirona, “neither more nor less. It was a heedless thing, no doubt, to admit him to my rooms, but no Vestal need be ashamed to own to such favour as I showed him. I am innocent, and I will remain so that I may stand in my father’s presence without a blush when I have earned money enough in the capital for the long journey.”

Paulus looked in her face astonished and almost horrified.

Then he had in fact taken on himself guilt

which did not exist, and perhaps the Senator would have been slower to condemn Sirona, if it had not been for his falsely acknowledging it. He stood before her, feeling like a child that would fain put together some object of artistic workmanship, and who has broken it to pieces for want of skill. At the same time he could not doubt a word that she said, for the voice within him had long since plainly told him that this woman was no common criminal.

For some time he was at a loss for words; at last he said timidly,

"What do you purpose doing in Alexandria?"

"Polykarp says, that all good work finds a purchaser there," she answered. "And I can weave particularly well, and embroider with gold-thread. Perhaps I may find shelter under some roof where there are children, and I would willingly attend to them during the day. In my free time and at night I could work at my frame, and when I have scraped enough together I shall soon find a ship that will carry

me to Gaul, to my own people. Do you not see that I cannot go back to Phœbicius, and can you help me?"

"Most willingly, and better perhaps than you fancy," said Paulus. "I cannot explain this to you just now; but you need not request me, but may rather feel that you have a good right to demand of me that I should rescue you."

She looked at him in surprised enquiry, and he continued,

"First let me carry away the little dog, and bury it down there. I will put a stone over the grave, that you may know where it lies. It must be so, the body cannot lie here any longer. Take the thing, which lies there. I had tried before to cut it out for you, for you complained yesterday that your hair was all in a tangle because you had not a comb, so I tried to carve you one out of bone. There were none at the shop in the oasis, and I am myself only a wild creature of the wilderness, a sorry, foolish animal, and do not use one. Was that a stone that fell? Aye, certainly, I hear a man's step;

go quickly into the cave and do not stir till I call you."

Sirona withdrew into her rock-dwelling, and Paulus took the body of the dog in his arms to conceal it from the man who was approaching. He looked round, undecided, and seeking a hiding-place for it, but two sharp eyes had already detected him and his small burden from the height above him; before he had found a suitable place, stones were rolling and crashing down from the cliff to the right of the cavern, and at the same time a man came springing down with rash boldness from rock to rock, and without heeding the warning voice of the anchorite, flung himself down the slope, straight in front of him, exclaiming, while he struggled for breath and his face was hot with hatred and excitement.

"That—I know it well—that is Sirona's greyhound—where is its mistress? Tell me this instant, where is Sirona—I must and will know."

Paulus had frequently seen, from the peni-

tent's room in the church, the Senator and his family in their places near the altar, and he was much astonished to recognise in the daring leaper, who rushed upon him like a mad man with dishevelled hair and fiery eyes, Polykarp, Petrus' second son.

The anchorite found it difficult to preserve his calm, and composed demeanour, for since he had been aware that he had accused Sirona falsely of a heavy sin, while at the same time he had equally falsely confessed himself the partner of her misdeed, he felt an anxiety that amounted to anguish, and a leaden oppression checked the rapidity of his thoughts. He at first stammered out a few unintelligible words, but his opponent was in fearful earnest with his question; he seized the collar of the anchorite's coarse garment with terrible violence, and cried in a husky voice, "Where did you find the dog? Where is—?"

But suddenly he left go his hold of the Alexandrian, looked at him from head to foot, and said softly and slowly,

"Can it be possible? Are you Paulus, the Alexandrian?"

The anchorite nodded assent. Polykarp laughed loud and bitterly, pressed his hand to his forehead, and exclaimed in a tone of the deepest disgust and contempt,

"And is it so, indeed! and such a repulsive ape too! But I will not believe that she even held out a hand to you, for the mere sight of you makes me dirty." Paulus felt his heart beating like a hammer within his breast, and there was a singing and roaring in his ears. When once more Polykarp threatened him with his fist he involuntarily took the posture of an athlete in a wrestling match, he stretched out his arms to try to get a good hold of his adversary, and said in a hollow, deep tone of angry warning, "Stand back, or something will happen to you that will not be good for your bones."

The speaker was indeed Paulus—and yet—not Paulus; it was Menander, the pride of the Palæstra, who had never let pass a word of his

comrades that did not altogether please him. And yet yesterday in the oasis he had quietly submitted to far worse insults than Polykarp had offered him, and had accepted them with contented cheerfulness. Whence then to-day this wild sensitiveness and eager desire to fight?

When, two days since, he had gone to his old cave to fetch the last of his hidden gold pieces, he had wished to greet old Stephanus, but the Egyptian attendant had scared him off like an evil spirit with angry curses, and had thrown stones after him. In the oasis he had attempted to enter the church in spite of the bishop's prohibition, there to put up a prayer; for he thought that the antechamber, where the spring was and in which penitents were wont to tarry, would certainly not be closed even to him; but the acolytes had driven him away with abusive words, and the door-keeper, who a short time since had trusted him with the key, spit in his face, and yet he had not found it difficult to turn his back on his persecutors without anger or complaint.

At the counter of the dealer of whom he had bought the woollen coverlet, the little jug, and many other things for Sirona, a priest had passed by, had pointed to his money, and had said,

“Satan takes care of his own.”

Paulus had answered him nothing, had returned to his charge with an uplifted and grateful heart, and had heartily rejoiced once more in the exalted and encouraging consciousness that he was enduring disgrace and suffering for another in humble imitation of Christ. What was it then that made him so acutely sensitive with regard to Polykarp, and once more snapped those threads, which long years of self-denial had twined into fetters for his impatient spirit? Was it that to the man, who mortified his flesh in order to free his soul from its bonds it seemed a lighter matter to be contemned as a sinner, hated of God, than to let his person and his manly dignity be treated with contempt? Was he thinking of the fair listener in the cave, who was a witness to his humiliation?

Had his wrath blazed up because he saw in Polykarp, not so much an exasperated fellow-believer, as merely a man who with bold scorn had put himself in the path of another man?

The lad and the grey-bearded athlete stood face to face like mortal enemies ready for the fight, and Polykarp did not waver, although he, like most Christian youths, had been forbidden to take part in the wrestling-games in the *Pa-læstra*, and though he knew that he had to deal with a strong and practised antagonist. He himself was indeed no weakling, and his stormy indignation added to his desire to measure himself against the hated seducer.

"Come on—come on!" he cried; his eyes flashing, and leaning forward with his neck outstretched and ready on his part for the struggle. "Grip hold! you were a gladiator, or something of the kind, before you put on that filthy dress that you might break into houses at night, and go unpunished. Make this sacred spot an arena, and if you succeed in making an end of me I will thank you, for what made life worth having

to me, you have already ruined whether or no. Only come on. Or perhaps you think it easier to ruin the life of a woman than to measure your strength against her defender? Clutch hold, I say, clutch hold, or—”

“Or you will fall upon me,” said Paulus, whose arms had dropped by his side during the youth’s address. He spoke in a quite altered tone of indifference. “Throw yourself upon me, and do with me what you will; I will not prevent you. Here I shall stand, and I will not fight, for you have so far hit the truth—this holy place is not an arena. But the Gaulish lady belongs neither to you nor to me, and who gives you a claim—?”

“Who gives me a right over her?” interrupted Polykarp, stepping close up to his questioner with sparkling eyes. “He who permits the worshipper to speak of *his* God. Sirona is mine, as the sun and moon and stars are mine, because they shed a beautiful light on my murky path. My life is mine—and she was the life of my life, and therefore I say boldly, and would

say, if there were twenty such as Phœbicius here, she belongs to me. And because I regarded her as my own, and so regard her still, I hate you and fling my scorn in your teeth—you are like a hungry sheep that has got into the gardener's flower-bed, and stolen from the stem the wonderful, lovely flower that he has nurtured with care, and that only blooms once in a hundred years—like a cat that has sneaked into some marble hall, and that to satisfy its greed has strangled some rare and splendid bird that a traveller has brought from a distant land. But you! you hypocritical robber, who disregard your own body with beastly pride, and sacrifice it to low brutality—what should you know of the magic charm of beauty—that daughter of heaven, that can touch even thoughtless children, and before which the gods themselves do homage! I have a right to Sirona; for hide her where you will—or even if the centurion were to find her, and to fetter her to himself with chains and rivets of brass—still that which makes her the noblest work of the

Most High—the image of her beauty—lives in no one, in no one as it lives in me. This hand has never even touched your victim—and yet God has given Sirona to no man as he has given her wholly to me, for to no man can she be what she is to me, and no man can love her as I do! She has the nature of an angel, and the heart of a child; she is without spot, and as pure as the diamond, or the swan's breast, or the morning-dew in the bosom of a rose. And though she had let you into her house a thousand times, and though my father even, and my own mother, and every one, every one pointed at her and condemned her, I would never cease to believe in her purity. It is you who have brought her to shame; it is you—"

"I kept silence while all condemned her," said Paulus with warmth, "for I believed that she was guilty, just as you believe that I am, just as every one that is bound by no ties of love is more ready to believe evil than good. Now I know, ay, know for certain, that we did the poor woman an injustice. If the splendour

of the lovely dream, that you call Sirona, has been clouded by my fault—”

“Clouded? And by you?” laughed Polykarp. “Can the toad that plunges into the sea, cloud its shining blue, can the black bat that flits across the night, cloud the pure light of the full moon?”

An emotion of rage again shot through the anchorite’s heart, but he was by this time on his guard against himself, and he only said bitterly, and with hardly-won composure,

“And how was it then with the flower, and with the bird, that were destroyed by beasts without understanding? I fancy you meant no absent third person by that beast, and yet now you declare that it is not within my power even to throw a shadow over your day-star! You see you contradict yourself in your anger, and the son of a wise man, who himself has not long since left the school of rhetoric, should try to avoid that. You might regard me with less hostility, for I will not offend you; nay, I will repay your evil words with good—

perhaps the very best indeed that you ever heard in your life. Sirona is a worthy and innocent woman, and at the time when Phœbicius came out to seek her, I had never even set eyes upon her nor had my ears ever heard a word pass her lips."

At these words, Polykarp's threatening manner changed, and feeling at once incapable of understanding the matter, and anxious to believe, he eagerly exclaimed,

"But yet the sheep-skin was yours, and you let yourself be thrashed by Phœbicius without defending yourself."

"So filthy an ape," said Paulus, imitating Polykarp's voice, "needs many blows, and that day I could not venture to defend myself because—because— But that is no concern of yours. You must subdue your curiosity for a few days longer, and then it may easily happen that the man whose very aspect makes you feel dirty—the bat, the toad—"

"Let that pass now," cried Polykarp. "Perhaps the excitement which the sight of you

stirred up in my bruised and wounded heart, led me to use unseemly language. Now, indeed, I see that your matted hair sits round a well featured countenance. Forgive my violent and unjust attack. I was beside myself, and I opened my whole soul to you, and now that you know how it is with me, "once more I ask you, where is Sirona?"

Polykarp looked Paulus in the face with anxious and urgent entreaty, pointing to the dog as much as to say, "You must know, for here is the evidence."

The Alexandrian hesitated to answer; he glanced by chance at the entrance of the cave, and seeing the gleam of Sirona's white robe behind the palm-branches, he said to himself that if Polykarp lingered much longer, he could not fail to discover her—a consummation to be avoided.

There were many reasons which might have made him resolve to stand in the way of a meeting between the lady and the young man, but not one of them occurred to him, and though

he did not even dream that a feeling akin to jealousy had begun to influence him, still he was conscious that it was his lively repugnance to seeing the two sink into each other's arms before his very eyes, that prompted him to turn shortly round, to take up the body of the little dog, and to say to the enquirer,

"It is true, I do know where *she is hiding*, and when the time comes you shall know it too. Now I must bury the animal, and if you will you can help me."

Without waiting for any objection on Polykarp's part, he hurried from stone to stone up to the plateau on the precipitous edge of which he had first seen Sirona. The younger man followed him breathlessly, and only joined him when he had already begun to dig out the earth with his hands at the foot of a cliff. Polykarp was now standing close to the anchorite, and repeated his question with vehement eagerness, but Paulus did not look up from his work, and only said, digging faster and faster,

"Come to this place again to-morrow, and

then it may perhaps be possible that I should tell you."

"You think to put me off with that," cried the lad. "Then you are mistaken in me, and if you cheat me with your honest-sounding words, I will—"

But he did not end his threat, for a clear longing cry distinctly broke the silence of the deserted mountain,

"Polykarp—Polykarp." It sounded nearer and nearer, and the words had a magic effect on him for whose ear they were intended.

With his head erect and trembling in every limb, the young man listened eagerly. Then he cried out, "It is her voice! I am coming, Sirona, I am coming." And without paying any heed to the anchorite, he was on the point of hurrying off to meet her. But Paulus placed himself close in front of him, and said sternly,

"You stay here."

"Out of my way," shouted Polykarp beside himself. "She is calling to me out of the hole where you are keeping her—you slanderer—"

you cowardly liar! Out of the way I say! You will not? Then defend yourself, you hideous toad, or I will tread you down, if my foot does not fear to be soiled with your poison."

Up to this moment Paulus had stood before the young man with outspread arms, motionless, but immovable as an oak-tree; now Polykarp first hit him. This blow shattered the anchorite's patience, and, no longer master of himself, he exclaimed, "You shall answer to me for this!" and before a third and fourth call had come from Sirona's lips, he had grasped the artist's slender body, and with a mighty swing he flung him backwards over his own broad and powerful shoulders on to the stony ground.

After this mad act he stood over his victim with outstretched legs, folded arms, and rolling eyes, as if rooted to the earth. He waited till Polykarp had picked himself up, and, without looking round, but pressing his hands to the back of his head, had tottered away like a drunken man.

Paulus looked after him till he disappeared over the cliff at the edge of the level ground; but he did not see how Polykarp fell senseless to the ground with a stifled cry, not far from the very spring whence his enemy had fetched the water to refresh Sirona's parched lips.

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## CHAPTER V.

"SHE will attract the attention of Damianus or Salathiel or one of the others up there," thought Paulus as he heard Sirona's call once more, and, following her voice, he went hastily and excitedly down the mountain-side.

"We shall have peace for to-day at any rate from that audacious fellow," muttered he to himself, "and perhaps to-morrow too, for his blue bruises will be a greeting from me. But how difficult it is to forget what we have once known! The grip, with which I flung him, I learned—how long ago?—from the chief-gymnast at Delphi. My marrow is not yet quite dried up, and that I will prove to the boy with these fists, if he comes back with three or four of the same mettle."

But Paulus had not long to indulge in such

wild thoughts, for on the way to the cave he met Sirona.

"Where is Polykarp?" she called out from afar.

"I have sent him home," he answered.

"And he obeyed you?" she asked again.

"I gave him striking reasons for doing so," he replied quickly.

"But he will return?"

"He has learned enough up here for to-day. We have now to think of your journey to Alexandria."

"But it seems to me," replied Sirona, blushing, "that I am safely hidden in your cave, and just now you yourself said—"

"I warned you against the dangers of the expedition," interrupted Paulus. "But since that it has occurred to me that I know of a shelter, and of a safe protector for you. There, we are at home again. Now go into the cave, for very probably some one may have heard you calling, and if other anchorites were

to discover you here, they would compel me to take you back to your husband."

"I will go directly," sighed Sirona, "but first explain to me—for I heard all that you said to each other—" and she coloured, "how it happened that Phœbicius took Hermas' sheep-skin for yours, and why you let him beat you without giving any explanation."

"Because my back is even broader than that great fellow's," replied the Alexandrian quickly. "I will tell you all about it in some quiet hour, perhaps on our journey to Klyσμα. Now go into the cave, or you may spoil everything. I know too what you lack most since you heard the fair words of the Senator's son."

"Well—what?" asked Sirona.

"A mirror!" laughed Paulus.

"How much you are mistaken!" said Sirona; and she thought to herself—"The woman that Polykarp looks at as he does at me, does not need a mirror."

An old Jewish merchant lived in the fishing-

town on the western declivity of the mountain; he shipped the charcoal for Egypt, which was made in the valleys of the peninsula by burning the sajal acacia, and he had formerly supplied fuel for the drying-room of the papyrus-factory of Paulus' father. He now had a business connexion with his brother, and Paulus himself had had dealings with him. He was prudent and wealthy, and whenever he met the anchorite, he blamed him for his flight from the world, and implored him to put his hospitality to the test, and to command his resources and means as if they were his own.

This man was now to find a boat, and to provide the means of flight for Sirona. The longer Paulus thought it over, the more indispensable it seemed to him that he should himself accompany the Gaulish lady to Alexandria, and in his own person find her a safe shelter. He knew that he was free to dispose of his brother's enormous fortune—half of which in fact was his—as though it were all his own, and he began to rejoice in his possessions for the first time for many years. Soon he was

occupied in thinking of the furnishing of the house, which he intended to assign to the fair Sirona. At first he thought of a simple citizen's dwelling, but by degrees he began to picture the house intended for her as fitted with shining gold, white and coloured marble, many-coloured Syrian carpets, nay even with vain works of the heathen, with statues, and a luxurious bath. In increasing unrest he wandered from rock to rock, and many times as he went up and down he paused in front of the cave where Sirona was. Once he saw her light robe, and its conspicuous gleam led him to the reflection, that it would be imprudent to conduct her to the humble fishing-village in that dress. If he meant to conceal her traces from the search of Phœbicius and Polykarp, he must first provide her with a simple dress, and a veil that should hide her shining hair and fair face, which even in the capital could find no match.

The Amalekite, from whom he had twice bought some goat's-milk for her, lived in a hut which Paulus could easily reach. He still pos-

sessed a few drachmas, and with these he could purchase what he needed from the wife and daughter of the goat-herd. Although the sky was now covered with mist and a hot sweltering south-wind had risen, he prepared to start at once. The sun was no longer visible though its scorching heat could be felt, but Paulus paid no heed to this sign of an approaching storm.

Hastily, and with so little attention that he confused one object with another in the little store-cellar, he laid some bread, a knife, and some dates in front of the entrance to the cave, called out to his guest that he should soon return, and hurried at a rapid pace up the mountain.

Sirona answered him with a gentle word of farewell, and did not even look round after him, for she was glad to be alone, and so soon as the sound of his step had died away she gave herself up once more to the overwhelming torrent of new and deep feelings which had flooded her soul ever since she had heard Polykarp's ardent hymn of love.

Paulus, in the last few hours, was Menander again, but the lonely woman in the cavern—the cause of this transformation—the wife of Phœbicius, had undergone an even greater change than he. She was still Sirona, and yet not Sirona.

When the anchorite had commanded her to retire into the cave she had obeyed him willingly, nay, she would have withdrawn even without his desire, and have sought for solitude; for she felt that something mighty, hitherto unknown to her, and incomprehensible even to herself, was passing in her soul, and that a nameless but potent something had grown up in her heart, had struggled free, and had found life and motion; a something that was strange, and yet precious to her, frightening, and yet sweet, a pain, and yet unspeakably delightful. An emotion such as she had never before known had mastered her, and she felt, since hearing Polykarp's speech, as if a new and purer blood was flowing rapidly through her veins. Every nerve quivered like the leaves of the poplars in her

former home when the wind blows down to meet the Rhone, and she found it difficult to follow what Paulus said, and still more so to find the right answer to his questions.

As soon as she was alone she sat down on her bed, rested her elbows on her knees, and her head in her hand, and the growing and surging flood of her passion broke out in an abundant stream of warm tears.

She had never wept so before; no anguish, no bitterness was infused into the sweet refreshing dew of those tears. Fair flowers of never dreamed of splendour and beauty blossomed in the heart of the weeping woman, and when at length her tears ceased, there was a great silence, but also a great glory within her and around her. She was like a man who has grown up in an underground-room, where no light of day can ever shine, and who at last is allowed to look at the blue heavens, at the splendour of the sun, at the myriad flowers and leaves in the green woods, and on the meadows.

She was wretched, and yet a happy woman.

"That is love!" were the words that her heart sang in triumph, and as her memory looked back on the admirers who had approached her in Arelas when she was still little more than a child, and afterwards in Rome, with tender words and looks, they all appeared like phantom forms carrying feeble tapers, whose light paled pitifully, for Polykarp had now come on the scene, bearing the very sun itself in his hands.

"They—and he," she murmured to herself, and she beheld as it were a balance, and on one of the scales lay the homage which in her vain fancy she had so coveted. It was of no more weight than chaff, and its whole mass was like a heap of straw, which flew up as soon as Polykarp laid his love—a hundredweight of pure gold, in the other scale.

"And if all the nations and kings of the earth brought their treasures together," thought she, "and laid them at my feet, they could not make me as rich as he has made me, and if all the stars were fused into one, the vast globe of

light which they would form could not shine so brightly as the joy that fills my soul. Come now what may, I will never complain after that hour of delight."

Then she thought over each of her former meetings with Polykarp, and remembered that he had never spoken to her of love. What must it not have cost him to control himself thus; and a great triumphant joy filled her heart at the thought that she was pure, and not unworthy of him, and an unutterable sense of gratitude rose up in her soul. The love she bore this man seemed to take wings, and it spread itself over the common life and aspect of the world, and rose to a spirit of devotion. With a deep sigh she raised her eyes and hands to heaven, and in her longing to prove her love to every living being, nay to every created thing, her spirit sought the mighty and beneficent Power to whom she owed such exalted happiness.

In her youth her father had kept her very strictly, but still he had allowed her to go through the streets of the town with her young com-

panions, wreathed with flowers, and all dressed in their best, in the procession of maidens at the feast of Venus of Arelas, to whom all the women of her native town were wont to turn with prayers and sacrifices when their hearts were touched by love.

Now she tried to pray to Venus, but again and again the wanton jests of the men who were used to accompany the maidens came into her mind, and memories of how she herself had eagerly listened for the only too frequent cries of admiration, and had enticed the silent with a glance, or thanked the more clamorous with a smile. To-day certainly she had no mind for such sport, and she recollected the stern words which had fallen from Dorothea's lips on the worship of Venus, when she had once told her how well the natives of Arelas knew how to keep their feasts.

And Polykarp, whose heart was nevertheless so full of love, he no doubt thought like his mother, and she pictured him as she had frequently seen him following his parents by the side of

his sister Marthana—often hand in hand with her—as they went to church. The Senator's son had always had a kindly glance for her, excepting when he was one of this procession to the temple of the God of whom they said that He was love itself, and whose votaries indeed were not poor in love; for in Petrus' house, if any where, all hearts were united by a tender affection. It then occurred to her that Paulus had just now advised her to turn to the crucified God of the Christians, who was full of an equal and divine love to all men. To him Polykarp also prayed—was praying perhaps at this very hour; and if she now did the same her prayers would ascend together with his, and so she might be in some sort one with that beloved friend, from whom everything else conspired to part her.

She knelt down and folded her hands, as she had so often seen Christians do, and she reflected on the torments that the poor Man, who hung with pierced hands on the cross, had so meekly endured, though He suffered inno-

cently; she felt the deepest pity for Him, and softly said to herself, as she raised her eyes to the low roof of her cave-dwelling,

“Thou poor good Son of God, Thou knowest what it is when all men condemn us unjustly, and surely, Thou canst understand when I say to Thee how sore my heart is! And they say too, that of all hearts Thine is the most loving, and so Thou wilt know how it is that, in spite of all my misery, it still seems to me that I am a happy woman. The very breath of a God must be rapture, and that Thou too must have learned when they tortured and mocked Thee, for Thou hast suffered out of love. They say, that Thou wast wholly pure and perfectly sinless. Now I—I have committed many follies, but not a sin—a real sin—no, indeed, I have not; and Thou must know it, for Thou art a God, and knowest the past, and canst read hearts. And, indeed, I also would fain remain innocent, and yet how can that be when I cannot help being devoted to Polykarp, and yet I am another man’s wife. But am I indeed the

true and lawful wife of that horrible wretch who sold me to another? He is as far from my heart—as far as if I had never seen him with these eyes. And yet—believe me—I wish him no ill, and I will be quite content, if only I need never go back to him.

“When I was a child, I was afraid of frogs; my brothers and sisters knew it, and once my brother Licinius laid a large one, that he had caught, on my bare neck. I started, and shuddered, and screamed out loud, for it was so hideously cold and damp—I cannot express it. And that is exactly how I have always felt since those days in Rome whenever Phœbicius touched me, and yet I dared not scream when he did.

“But Polykarp! oh! would that he were here, and might only grasp my hand. He said I was his own, and yet I have never encouraged him. But now! if a danger threatened him or a sorrow, and if by any means I could save him from it, indeed—indeed—though I never could bear pain well, and am afraid of death, I would

let them nail me to a cross for him, as Thou wast crucified for us all.

“But then he must know that I had died for him, and if he looked into my dying eyes with his strange, deep gaze, I would tell him that it is to him that I owe a love so great that it is a thing altogether different and higher than any love I have ever before seen. And a feeling that is so far above all measure of what ordinary mortals experience, it seems to me, must be divine. Can such love be wrong? I know not; but Thou knowest, and Thou, whom they name the Good Shepherd, lead Thou us—each apart from the other, if it be best so for him—but yet, if it be possible, unite us once more, if it be only for one single hour. If only he could know that I am not wicked, and that poor Sirona would willingly belong to him, and to no other, then I would be ready to die. O Thou good, kind Shepherd, take me too into Thy flock, and guide me.”

Thus prayed Sirona, and before her fancy there floated the image of a lovely and loving

youthful form; she had seen the original in the model for Polykarp's noble work, and she had not forgotten the exquisite details of the face. It seemed to her as well known and familiar as if she had known—what in fact she could not even guess—that she herself had had some share in the success of the work.

The love which unites two hearts is like the ocean of Homer which encircles both halves of the earth. It flows and rolls on. Where shall we seek its source—here or there—who can tell?

It was dame Dorothea who in her motherly pride had led the Gaulish lady into her son's workshop. Sirona thought of her and her husband and her house, where over the door a motto was carved in the stone which she had seen every morning from her sleeping-room. She could not read Greek, but Polykarp's sister, Marthana, had more than once told her what it meant. "Commit thy way to the Lord, and put thy trust in Him," ran the inscription, and she repeated it to herself again and again, and

then drew fancy-pictures of the future in smiling day-dreams, which by degrees assumed sharper outlines and brighter colours.

She saw herself united to Polykarp, and as the daughter of Petrus and Dorothea, at home in the Senator's house; she had a right now to the children who loved her, and who were so dear to her; she helped the deaconess in all her labours, and won praise, and looks of approval. She had learned to use her hands in her father's house and now she could show what she could do; Polykarp even gazed at her with surprise and admiration, and said that she was as clever as she was beautiful, and promised to become a second Dorothea. She went with him into his workshop, and there arranged all the things that lay about in confusion, and dusted it, while he followed her every movement with his gaze, and at last stood before her, his arms wide—wide open to clasp her.

She started, and pressed her hands over her eyes, and flung herself loving and beloved on

his breast, and would have thrown her arms round his neck, while her hot tears flowed—but the sweet vision was suddenly shattered, for a swift flash of light pierced the gloom of the cavern, and immediately after she heard the heavy roll of the thunder-clap, dulled by the rocky walls of her dwelling.

Completely recalled to actuality she listened for a moment, and then stepped to the entrance of the cave. It was already dusk, and heavy rain-drops were falling from the dark clouds which seemed to shroud the mountain peaks in a vast veil of black crape. Paulus was nowhere to be seen, but there stood the food he had prepared for her. She had eaten nothing since her breakfast, and she now tried to drink the milk, but it had curdled and was not fit to use; a small bit of bread and a few dates quite satisfied her.

As the lightning and thunder began to follow each other more and more quickly, and the darkness fast grew deeper, a great fear fell upon her; she pushed the food on one side, and looked

up to the mountain where the peaks were now wholly veiled in night, now seemed afloat in a sea of flame, and more distinctly visible than by day-light. Again and again a forked flash like a saw-blade of fire cut through the black curtain of cloud with terrific swiftness, again and again the thunder sounded like a blast of trumpets through the silent wilderness, and multiplied itself, clattering, growling, roaring, and echoing from rock to rock. Light and sound at last seemed to be hurled from Heaven together, and the very rock in which her cave was formed quaked.

Crushed and trembling she drew back into the inmost depth of her rocky-chamber, starting at each flash that illumined the darkness.

At length they occurred at longer intervals, the thunder lost its appalling fury, and as the wind drove the storm farther and farther to the southwards, at last it wholly died away.

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## CHAPTER VI.

IT was quite dark in Sirona's cavern, fearfully dark, and the blacker grew the night which shrouded her, the more her terror increased. From time to time she shut her eyes as tightly as she could, for she fancied she could see a crimson glare, and she longed for light in that hour as a drowning man longs for the shore. Dark forebodings of every kind oppressed her soul.

What if Paulus had abandoned her, and had left her to her fate? Or if Polykarp should have been searching for her on the mountain in this storm, and in the darkness should have fallen into some abyss, or have been struck by the lightning? Suppose the mass of rock that overhung the entrance to the cave should have been loosened in the storm, and should fall, and bar her exit to the open air? Then she

would be buried alive, and she must perish alone, without seeing him whom she loved once more, or telling him that she had not been unworthy of his trust in her.

Cruelly tormented by such thoughts as these, she dragged herself up and felt her way out into the air and wind, for she could no longer hold out in the gloomy solitude and fearful darkness. She had hardly reached the mouth of the cave, when she heard steps approaching her lurking place, and again she shrank back. Who was it that could venture in this pitch-dark night to climb from rock to rock? Was it Paulus returning? Was it he—was it Polykarp seeking her?

She felt intoxicated; she pressed her hands to her heart, and longed to cry out, but she dared not, and her tongue refused its office. She listened with the tension of terror to the sound of the steps which came straight towards her nearer and nearer, then the wanderer perceived the faint gleam of her white dress, and called out to her. It was Paulus.

She drew a deep breath of relief when she recognised his voice, and answered his call.

"In such weather as this," said the anchorite, "it is better to be within than without, it seems to me, for it is not particularly pleasant out here, so far as I have found."

"But it has been frightful here inside the cave too," Sirona answered, "I have been so dreadfully frightened, I was so lonely in the horrible darkness. If only I had had my little dog with me, it would at least have been a living being."

"I have made haste as well as I could," interrupted Paulus. "The paths are not so smooth here as the Kanopic road in Alexandria, and as I have not three necks like Cerberus, who lies at the feet of Serapis, it would have been wiser of me to return to you a little more leisurely. The storm-bird has swallowed up all the stars as if they were flies, and the poor old mountain is so grieved at it, that streams of tears are everywhere flowing over his stony cheeks. It is wet even here. Now go back

into the cave, and let me lay this that I have got here for you in my arms, in the dry passage. I bring you good news; to-morrow evening, when it is growing dusk, we start. I have found out a vessel which will convey us to Klysma, and from thence I myself will conduct you to Alexandria. In the sheep-skin here you will find the dress and veil of an Amalekite woman, and if your traces are to be kept hidden from Phœbicius, you must accommodate yourself to this disguise; for if the people down there were to see you as I saw you to-day, they would think that Aphrodite herself had risen from the sea, and the report of the fair-haired beauty that had appeared among them would soon spread even to the oasis."

"But it seems to me that I am well hidden here," replied Sirona. "I am afraid of a sea-voyage, and even if we succeeded in reaching Alexandria without impediment, still I do not know—"

"It shall be my business to provide for you there." Paulus interrupted with a decision that

was almost boastful, and that somewhat disturbed Sirona. "You know the fable of the ass in the lion's skin, but there are lions who wear the skin of an ass on their shoulders—or of a sheep, it comes to the same thing. Yesterday you were speaking of the splendid palaces of the citizens, and lauding the happiness of their owners. You shall dwell in one of those marble houses, and rule it as its mistress, and it shall be my care to procure you slaves, and litter-bearers, and a carriage with four mules. Do not doubt my word, for I am promising nothing that I cannot perform. The rain is ceasing, and I will try to light a fire. You want nothing more to eat? Well then, I will wish you good-night. The rest will all do to-morrow."

Sirona had listened in astonishment to the anchorite's promises.

How often had she envied those who possessed all that her strange protector now promised her—and now it had not the smallest charm for her; and, fully determined in any case not to follow Paulus, whom she began to distrust,

she replied, as she coldly returned his greeting, "There are many hours yet before to-morrow evening in which we can discuss everything."

While Paulus was with great difficulty re-kindling the fire, she was once more alone, and again she began to be alarmed in the dark cavern.

She called the Alexandrian. "The darkness terrifies me so," she said. "You still had some oil in the jug this morning; perhaps you may be able to contrive a little lamp for me; it is so fearful to stay here in the dark."

Paulus at once took a shard, tore a strip from his tattered coat, twisted it together, and laid it for a wick in the greasy fluid, lighted it at the slowly reviving fire, and putting this more than simple light in Sirona's hand, he said,

"It will serve its purpose; in Alexandria I will see that you have lamps which give more light, and which are made by a better artist."

Sirona placed the lamp in a hollow in the rocky wall at the head of her bed, and then lay down to rest.

Light scares away wild beasts and fear too from the resting-place of man, and it kept terrifying thoughts far away from the Gaulish woman.

She contemplated her situation clearly and calmly, and quite decided that she would neither quit the cave, nor entrust herself to the anchorite, till she had once more seen and spoken to Polykarp. He no doubt knew where to seek her, and certainly, she thought, he would by this time have returned, if the storm and the starless night had not rendered it an impossibility to come up the mountain from the oasis.

“To-morrow I shall see him again, and then I will open my heart to him, and he shall read my soul like a book, and on every page, and in every line he will find his own name. And I will tell him too that I have prayed to his ‘Good Shepherd,’ and how much good it has done me, and that I will be a Christian like his sister Marthana and his mother. Dorothea will be glad indeed when she hears it, and she at any

rate cannot have thought that I was wicked, for she always loved me, and the children—the children—”

The bright crowd of merry faces came smiling in upon her fancy, and her thoughts passed insensibly into dreams; kindly sleep touched her heart with its gentle hand, and its breath swept every shadow of trouble from her soul. She slept, smiling and untroubled as a child whose eyes some guardian angel softly kisses, while her strange protector now turned the flickering wood on the damp hearth and with a reddening face blew up the dying charcoal fire, and again walked restlessly up and down, and paused each time he passed the entrance to the cave, to throw a longing glance at the light which shone out from Sirona's sleeping room.

Since the moment when he had flung Polykarp to the ground, Paulus had not succeeded in recovering his self-command; not for a moment had he regretted the deed, for the reflection had never occurred to him, that a fall on the stony soil of the Sacred Mountain, which was as hard

as iron, must hurt more than a fall on the sand of the arena.

"The impudent fellow," thought he, "richly deserved what he got. Who gave him a better right over Sirona than he, Paulus himself, had—he who had saved her life, and had taken it upon himself to protect her?"

Her great beauty had charmed him from the first moment of their meeting, but no impure thought stirred his heart as he gazed at her with delight, and listened with emotion to her childlike talk. It was the hot torrent of Polykarp's words that had first thrown the spark into his soul, which jealousy and the dread of having to abandon Sirona to another, had soon fanned into a consuming flame. He would not give up this woman, he would continue to care for her every need, she should owe everything to him, and to him only. And so, without reserve, he devoted himself body and soul to the preparations for her flight. The hot breath of the storm, the thunder and lightning, torrents of rain, and blackness of night could not delay

him, while he leaped from rock to rock, feeling his way—soaked through, weary and in peril; he thought only of her, and of how he could most safely carry her to Alexandria, and then surround her with all that could charm a woman's taste. Nothing—nothing did he desire for himself, and all that he dreamed of and planned turned only and exclusively on the pleasure which he might afford her. When he had prepared and lighted the lamp for her he saw her again, and was startled at the beauty of the face that the trembling flame revealed. He could observe her a few seconds only, and then she had vanished, and he must remain alone in the darkness and the rain. He walked restlessly up and down, and an agonising longing once more to see her face lighted up by the pale flame, and the white arm that she had held out to take the lamp, grew more and more strong in him and accelerated the pulses of his throbbing heart. As often as he passed the cave, and observed the glimmer of light that came from her room, he felt prompted and urged to

slip in, and to gaze on her once more. He never once thought of prayer and scourging, his old means of grace, he sought rather for a reason that might serve him as an excuse if he went in, and it struck him that it was cold, and that a sheep-skin was lying in the cavern. He would fetch it, in spite of his vow never to wear a sheep-skin again; and supposing he were thus enabled to see her, what next?

When he had stepped across the threshold, an inward voice warned him to return, and told him that he must be treading the path of unrighteousness, for that he was stealing in on tip-toe like a thief; but the excuse was ready at once. "That is for fear of waking her, if she is asleep."

And now all farther reflection was silenced for he had already reached the spot where, at the end of the rocky passage, the cave widened into her sleeping-room; there she lay on her hard couch, sunk in slumber and enchantingly fair.

A deep gloom reigned around, and the feeble

light of the little lamp lighted up only a small portion of the dismal chamber, but the head, throat, and arms that it illuminated seemed to shine with a light of their own that enhanced and consecrated the light of the feeble flame. Paulus fell breathless on his knees, and fixed his eyes with growing eagerness on the graceful form of the sleeper.

Sirona was dreaming; her head, veiled in her golden hair, rested on a high pillow of herbs, and her delicately rosy face was turned up to the vault of the cave; her half-closed lips moved gently, and now she moved her bent arm and her white hand, on which the light of the lamp fell, and which rested half on her forehead and half on her shining hair.

"Is she saying anything?" asked Paulus of himself, and he pressed his brow against a projection of the rock as tightly as if he would stem the rapid rush of his blood that it might not overwhelm his bewildered brain.

Again she moved her lips. Had she indeed spoken? Had she perhaps called him?

That could not be, for she still slept; but he wished to believe it—and he would believe it, and he stole nearer to her and nearer, and bent over her, and listened—while his own strength failed him even to draw a breath—listened to the soft regular breathing that heaved her bosom. No longer master of himself he touched her white arm with his bearded lips and she drew it back in her sleep, then his gaze fell on her parted lips and the pearly teeth that shone between them, and a mad longing to kiss them came irresistibly over him. He bent trembling over her, and was on the point of gratifying his impulse when, as if startled by a sudden apparition, he drew back, and raised his eyes from the rosy lips to the hand that rested on the sleeper's brow.

The lamp-light played on a golden ring on Sirona's finger, and shone brightly on an onyx on which was engraved an image of Tyche, the tutelary goddess of Antioch, with a sphere upon her head, and bearing Amalthea's horn in her hand.

A new and strange emotion took possession of the anchorite at the sight of this stone. With trembling hands he felt in the breast of his torn garment, and presently drew forth a small iron crucifix and the ring that he had taken from the cold hand of Hermas' mother. In the golden circlet was set an onyx, on which precisely the same device was visible as that on Sirona's hand. The string with its precious jewel fell from his grasp, he clutched his matted hair with both hands, groaned deeply, and repeated again and again, as though to crave forgiveness, the name of "Magdalen."

Then he called Sirona in a loud voice, and as she awoke excessively startled, he asked her in urgent tones,

"Who gave you that ring?"

"It was a present from Phœbicius," replied she. "He said he had had it given to him many years since in Antioch, and that it had been engraved by a great artist. But I do not want it any more, and if you like to have it you may."

"Throw it away!" exclaimed Paulus, "it will bring you nothing but misfortune." Then he collected himself, went out into the air with his head sunk on his breast, and there, throwing himself down on the wet stones by the hearth, he cried out,

"Magdalen! dearest and purest! You, when you ceased to be Glycera, became a saintly martyr, and found the road to Heaven; I too had my day of Damascus—of revelation and conversion—and I dared to call myself by the name of Paulus—and now—now?"

Plunged in despair he beat his forehead, groaning out, "All, all in vain!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

COMMON natures can only be lightly touched by the immeasurable depth of anguish that is experienced by a soul that despairs of itself; but the more heavily the blow of such suffering falls, the more surely does it work with purifying power on him who has to taste of that cup.

Paulus thought no more of the fair, sleeping woman; tortured by acute remorse he lay on the hard stones, feeling that he had striven in vain. When he had taken Hermas' sin and punishment and disgrace upon himself, it had seemed to him that he was treading in the very footsteps of the Saviour. And now?—He felt like one who, while running for a prize, stumbles over a stone and grovels in the sand when he is already close to the goal.

"God sees the will and not the deed," he

muttered to himself. "What I did wrong with regard to Sirona—or what I did not do—that matters not. When I leaned over her, I had fallen utterly and entirely into the power of the evil one, and was an ally of the deadliest enemy of Him to whom I had dedicated my life and soul. Of what avail was my flight from the world, and my useless sojourn in the desert? He who always keeps out of the way of the battle can easily boast of being unconquered to the end—but is he therefore a hero? The palm belongs to him who in the midst of the struggles and affairs of the world clings to the Heavenward road, and never lets himself be diverted from it; but as for me who walk here alone, a woman and a boy cross my path, and one threatens and the other beckons to me, and I forget my aim and stumble into the bog of iniquity. And so I cannot find—no, here I cannot find what I strive after. But how then—how? Enlighten me, O Lord, and reveal to me what I must do."

Thus thinking he rose, knelt down, and

prayed fervently; when at last he came to the 'Amen,' his head was burning, and his tongue parched.

The clouds had parted, though they still hung in black masses in the west; from time to time gleams of lightning shone luridly on the horizon and lighted up the jagged peak of mountain with a flare; the moon had risen, but its waning disk was frequently obscured by dark driving masses of cloud; blinding flashes, tender light, and utter darkness were alternating with bewildering rapidity, when Paulus at last collected himself, and went down to the spring to drink, and to cool his brow in the fresh water. Striding from stone to stone he told himself, that ere he could begin a new life, he must do penance—some heavy penance; but what was it to be? He was standing at the very margin of the brook, hemmed in by cliffs, and was bending down to it, but before he had moistened his lips he drew back: just because he was so thirsty he resolved to deny himself drink. Hastily, almost vehemently, he turned

his back on the spring, and after this little victory over himself, his storm-tossed heart seemed a little calmer. Far, far from hence and from the wilderness and from the Sacred Mountain he felt impelled to fly, and he would gladly have fled then and there to a distance. Whither should he flee? It was all the same, for he was in search of suffering, and suffering, like weeds, grows on every road. And from whom? This question repeated itself again and again as if he had shouted it in the very home of echo, and the answer was not hard to find: "It is from yourself that you would flee. It is your own inmost self that is your enemy; bury yourself in what desert you will, it will pursue you, and it would be easier for you to cut off your shadow than to leave that behind?"

His whole consciousness was absorbed by this sense of impotency, and now, after the stormy excitement of the last few hours, the deepest depression took possession of his mind. Exhausted, unstrung, full of loathing of himself and life, he sank down on a stone, and thought

over the occurrences of the last few days with perfect impartiality.

"Of all the fools that ever I met," thought he, "I have gone farthest in folly, and have thereby led things into a state of confusion which I myself could not make straight again, even if I were a sage—which I certainly never shall be any more than a tortoise or a phoenix. I once heard tell of a hermit who, because it is written that we ought to bury the dead, and because he had no corpse, slew a traveller that he might fulfil the commandment: I have acted in exactly the same way, for, in order to spare another man suffering and to bear the sins of another, I have plunged an innocent woman into misery, and made myself indeed a sinner. As soon as it is light I will go down to the oasis and confess to Petrus and Dorothea what I have done. They will punish me, and I will honestly help them, so that nothing of the penance that they may lay upon me may be remitted. The less mercy I show to myself, the more will the Eternal Judge show to me."

He rose, considered the position of the stars, and when he perceived that morning was not far off, he prepared to return to Sirona, who was no longer any more to him than an unhappy woman to whom he owed reparation for much evil, when a loud cry of distress in the immediate vicinity fell on his ear.

He mechanically stooped to pick up a stone for a weapon, and listened. He knew every rock in the neighbourhood of the spring, and when the strange groan again made itself heard, he knew that it came from a spot which he knew well and where he had often rested, because a large flat stone supported by a stout pillar of granite, stood up far above the surrounding rocks, and afforded protection from the sun, even at noon-day, when not a hand's breadth of shade was to be found elsewhere.

Perhaps some wounded beast had crept under the rock for shelter from the rain. Paulus went cautiously forward. The groaning sounded louder and more distinct than before, and beyond a doubt it was the voice of a human being.

The anchorite hastily threw away the stone, fell upon his knees, and soon found on the dry spot of ground under the stone, and in the farthest nook of the retreat, a motionless human form.

"It is most likely a herdsman that has been struck by lightning," thought he, as he felt with his hands the curly head of the sufferer, and the strong arms that now hung down powerless. As he raised the injured man, who still uttered low moans, and supported his head on his broad breast, the sweet perfume of fine ointment was wafted to him from his hair, and a fearful suspicion dawned upon his mind.

"Polykarp!" he cried, while he clasped his hands more tightly round the body of the sufferer who, thus called upon, moved and muttered a few unintelligible words; in a low tone, but still much too clearly for Paulus, for he now knew for certain that he had guessed rightly. With a loud cry of horror he grasped the youth's powerless form, raised him in his arms, and carried him like a child to the margin of the

spring where he laid his noble burden down in the moist grass; Polykarp started and opened his eyes.

Morning was already dawning, the light clouds on the eastern horizon were already edged with rosy fringes, and the coming day began to lift the dark veil from the forms and hues of creation.

The young man recognised the anchorite, who with trembling hands was washing the wound at the back of his head, and his eye assumed an angry glare as he called up all his remaining strength and pushed his attendant from him. Paulus did not withdraw, he accepted the blow from his victim as a gift or a greeting, thinking, "Aye, and I only wish you had a dagger in your hand; I would not resist you."

The artist's wound was frightfully wide and deep, but the blood had flowed among his thick curls, and had clotted over the lacerated veins like a thick dressing. The water with which Paulus now washed his head reopened them,

and renewed the bleeding, and after the one powerful effort with which Polykarp pushed away his enemy, he fell back senseless in his arms. The wan morning-light added to the pallor of the bloodless countenance that lay with glazed eyes in the anchorite's lap.

"He is dying!", murmured Paulus in deadly anguish and with choking breath, while he looked across the valley and up to the heights, seeking help. The mountain rose in front of him, its majestic mass glowing in the rosy dawn, while light translucent vapour floated round the peak where the Lord had written His laws for His chosen people, and for all peoples, on tables of stone; it seemed to Paulus that he saw the giant form of Moses far, far up on its sublimest height and that from his lips in brazen tones the strictest of all the commandments was thundered down upon him with awful wrath, "Thou shalt not kill!"

Paulus clasped his hands before his face in silent despair, while his victim still lay in his lap. He had closed his eyes, for he dared not

look on the youth's pale countenance, and still less dared he look up at the mountain; but the brazen voice from the height did not cease, and sounded louder and louder; half beside himself with excitement, in his inward ear he heard it still, "Thou shalt not kill!" and then again, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife!" a third time, "Thou shalt not commit adultery!" and at last a fourth, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me!"

He that sins against one of those laws is damned; and he—he had broken them all, broken them while striving to tread the thorny path to a life of blessedness.

Suddenly and wildly he threw his arms up to heaven, and sighing deeply, gazed up at the sacred hill.

What was that? On the topmost peak of Sinai whence the Pharanite sentinels were accustomed to watch the distance, a handkerchief was waving as a signal that the enemy were approaching.

He could not be mistaken, and as in the face of approaching danger he collected himself and recovered his powers of thought and deliberation, his ear distinctly caught the mighty floods of stirring sound that came over the mountain, from the brazen cymbals struck by the watchmen to warn the inhabitants of the oasis, and the anchorites.

Was Hermas returned? Had the Blemmyes outstripped him? From what quarter were the marauding hosts coming on? Could he venture to remain here near his victim, or was it his duty to use his powerful arms in defence of his helpless companions? In agonised doubt he looked down at the youth's pallid features, and deep, sorrowful compassion filled his mind.

How promising was this young tree of humanity that his rough fist had broken off! and these brown curls had only yesterday been stroked by a mother's hand. His eyes filled with tears, and he bent as tenderly as a father might over the pale face, and pressed a gentle

kiss on the bloodless lips of the senseless youth. A thrill of joy shot through him, for Polykarp's lips were indeed not cold, he moved his hand, and now—the Lord be praised! he actually opened his eyes.

“And I am not a murderer!” A thousand voices seem to sing with joy in his heart, and then he thought to himself,

“First I will carry him down to his parents in the oasis, and then go up to the brethren.”

But the brazen signals rang out with renewed power, and the stillness of the Holy wilderness was broken here by the clatter of men's voices, there by a blast of trumpets, and there again by stifled cries. It was as if a charm had given life to the rocks and lent them voices; as if noise and clamour were rushing like wild torrents down every gorge and cleft of the mountain-side.

“It is too late,” sighed the anchorite. “If I only could—if I only knew—”

“Hallo! hallo! holy Paulus!” a shrill wo-

man's voice which seemed to come from high up in the air rang out joyful and triumphant, interrupting the irresolute man's meditations, "Hermas is alive! Hermas is here again! Only look up at the heights. There flies the standard, for he has warned the sentinels. The Blem-myes are coming on, and he sent me to seek you. You must come to the strong tower on the western side of the ravine. Make haste! come at once! Do you hear? He told me to tell you. But the man in your lap—it is—yes, it is—"

"It is your master's son Polykarp," Paulus called back to her. "He is hurt unto death; hurry down to the oasis, and tell the Senator, tell Dame Dorothea—"

"I have something else to do now," interrupted the shepherdess. "Hermas has sent me to warn Gelasius, Psoes, and Dulas, and if I went down into the oasis they would lock me up, and not let me come up the mountain again. What has happened to the poor fellow? But it is all the same; there is something else for

you to do besides grieving over a hole in Polykarp's head. Go up to the tower, I tell you, and let him lie—or carry him up with you into your new den, and hand him over to your sweetheart to nurse."

"Demon!" exclaimed Paulus, taking up a stone.

"Let him lie!" repeated Miriam. "I will betray her hiding-place to Phœbicius, if you do not do as Hermas orders you. Now I am off to call the others, and we shall meet again at the tower. And you had better not linger too long with your fair companion—pious Paulus—saintly Paulus!"

And laughing loudly, she sprang away from rock to rock as if borne up by the air.

The Alexandrian looked wrathfully after her; but her advice did not seem to be bad, he lifted the wounded man on his shoulders, and hastily carried him up towards his cave; but before he could reach it he heard steps, and a loud agonised scream, and in a few seconds

Sirona was by his side, crying in passionate grief, "It is he, it is he—and oh, to see him thus!—But he must live, for if he were dead your God of Love would be inexorable, pitiless, hard, cruel—it would be—"

She could say no more, for tears choked her voice, and Paulus, without listening to her lamentation, passed quickly on in front of her, entered the cave and laid the unconscious man down on the couch, saying gravely but kindly, as Sirona threw herself on her knees and pressed the young man's powerless hand to her lips,

"If indeed you truly love him, cease crying and lamenting. He yesterday got a severe wound on his head; I have washed it, now do you bind it up with care, and keep it constantly cool with fresh water. You know your way to the spring; when he recovers his senses rub his feet, and give him some bread and a few drops of the wine which you will find in the little cellar hard by; there is some oil there too, which you will need for a light.

"I must go up to the brethren, and if I do not return to-morrow, give the poor lad over to his mother to nurse. Only tell her this, that I, Paulus, gave him this wound in a moment of rage, and to forgive me if she can, she and Petrus. And you too forgive me that in which I have sinned against you, and if I should fall in the battle which awaits us, pray that the Lord may not be too hard upon me in the day of judgment, for my sins are great and many."

At this moment the sound of the trumpets sounded even into the deepest recess of the cave. Sirona started. "That is the Roman tuba," she exclaimed. "I know the sound—Phœbicius is coming this way."

"He is doing his duty," replied Paulus. "And still, one thing more. I saw last night a ring on your hand—an onyx."

"There it lies," said Sirona; and she pointed to the farthest corner of the cave, where it lay on the dusty soil.

"Let it remain there," Paulus begged of her; he bent over the senseless man once more to kiss his forehead, raised his hand towards Sirona in sign of blessing, and rushed out into the open air.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

TWO paths led over the mountain from the oasis to the sea; both followed deep and stony gorges, one of which was named the "short cut," because the traveller reached his destination more quickly by that road than by following the better road in the other ravine, which was practicable for beasts of burden. Half-way up the height the "short cut" opened out on a little plateau, whose western side was shut in by a high mass of rock with steep and precipitous flanks. At the top of this rock stood a tower built of rough blocks, in which the anchorites were wont to take refuge when they were threatened with a descent of their foes.

The position of this castle—as the penitents proudly styled their tower—was well-chosen, for from its summit they commanded not only the

"short cut" to the oasis, but also the narrow shell-strewn strip of desert which divided the western declivity of the Holy Mountain from the shore, the blue-green waters of the sea, and the distant chain of hills on the African coast.

Whatever approached the tower, whether from afar or from the neighbourhood, was at once espied by them, and the side of the rock which was turned to the road-way was so precipitous and smooth that it remained inaccessible even to the natives of the desert, who, with their naked feet and sinewy arms, could climb points which even the wild goat and the jackal made a circuit to avoid. It was more accessible from the other side, and in order to secure that, a very strong wall had been built, which enclosed the level on which the castle stood in the form of a horse-shoe, of which the ends abutted on the declivity of the short road. This structure was so roughly and inartistic-ally heaped together that it looked as if formed by nature rather than by the hand of

man. The rough and unfinished appearance of this wall-like heap of stones was heightened by the quantity of large and small pieces of granite which were piled on the top of it, and which had been collected by the anchorites, in case of an incursion, to roll and hurl down on the invading robbers. A cistern had been dug out of the rocky soil of the plateau which the wall enclosed, and care was taken to keep it constantly filled with water.

Such precautions were absolutely necessary, for the anchorites were threatened with dangers from two sides. First from the Ishmaelite hordes of Saracens who fell upon them from the East, and secondly from the Blemmyes, the wild inhabitants of the desert-country which borders the fertile lands of Egypt and Nubia, and particularly of the barren highlands that part the Red Sea from the Nile valley; they crossed the sea in light skiffs, and then poured over the mountain like a swarm of locusts.

The little stores and savings which the de-

fenceless hermits treasured in their caves had tempted the Blemmyes again and again, in spite of the Roman garrison in Pharan, which usually made its appearance on the scene of their incursion long after they had disappeared with their scanty booty. Not many months since, the raid had been effected in which old Stephanus had been wounded by an arrow, and there was every reason to hope that the wild marauders would not return very soon, for Phœbicius, the commander of the Roman maniple in the oasis, was swift and vigorous in his office, and though he had not succeeded in protecting the anchorites from all damage, he had followed up the Blemmyes, who fled at his approach, and cut them off from rejoining their boats. A battle took place between the barbarians and the Romans, not far from the coast on the desert tract dividing the hills from the sea, which resulted in the total annihilation of the wild tribes and gave ground to hope that such a lesson might serve as a warning to the sons of the desert. But if

hitherto the more easily quelled promptings of covetousness had led them to cross the sea, they were now animated by the most sacred of all duties, by the law which required them to avenge the blood of their fathers and brothers, and they dared to plan a fresh incursion in which they should put forth all their resources. They were at the same time obliged to exercise the greatest caution, and collected their forces of young men in the valleys that lay hidden in the long range of coast-hills.

The passage of the narrow arm of the sea that parted them from Arabia Petræa, was to be effected in the first dark night; the sun, this evening, had set behind heavy storm-clouds that had discharged themselves in violent rain and had obscured the light of the waning moon. So they drew their boats and rafts down to the sea, and, unobserved by the sentinels on the mountain who had taken shelter from the storm under their little penthouses, they would have reached the opposite shore, the mountain,

and perhaps even the oasis, if some one had not warned the anchorites—and that some one was Hermas.

Obedient to the commands of Paulus, the lad had appropriated three of his friend's gold pieces, had provided himself with a bow and arrows and some bread, and then, after muttering a farewell to his father who was asleep in his cave, he set out for Raïthu. Happy in the sense of his strength and manhood, proud of the task which had been set him and which he deemed worthy of a future soldier, and cheerfully ready to fulfil it even at the cost of his life, he hastened forward in the bright moonlight. He quitted the path at the spot where, to render the ascent possible even to the vigorous desert-travellers, it took a zig-zag line, and clambered from rock to rock, up and down in a direct line; when he came to a level spot he flew on as if pursuers were at his heels. After sunrise he refreshed himself with a morsel of food, and then hurried on again, not heeding the heat of noon, nor that of the soft sand

in which his foot sank as he followed the line of the sea-coast.

Thus passionately hurrying onwards he thought neither of Sirona nor of his past life—only of the hills on the farther shore and of the Blemmyes—how he should best surprise them, and, when he had learnt their plans, how he might recross the sea and return to his own people. At last, as he got more and more weary, as the heat of the sun grew more oppressive, and as the blood rushed more painfully to his heart and began to throb more rapidly in his temples, he lost all power of thought, and that which dwelt in his mind was no more than a dumb longing to reach his destination as soon as possible.

It was the third afternoon when he saw from afar the palms of Raïthu, and hurried on with revived strength. Before the sun had set he had informed the anchorite, to whom Paulus had directed him, that the Alexandrian declined their call, and was minded to remain on the Holy Mountain.

Then Hermas proceeded to the little harbour, to bargain with the fishermen of the place for the boat which he needed. While he was talking with an old Amalekite boat-man, who, with his black-eyed sons, was arranging his nets, two riders came at a quick pace towards the bay in which a large merchant-ship lay at anchor, surrounded by little barks. The fisherman pointed to it.

"It is waiting for the caravan from Petra," he said. "There, on the dromedary, is the emperor's great warrior who commands the Romans in Pharan."

Hermas saw Phœbicius for the first time, and as he rode up towards him and the fisherman he started; if he had followed his first impulse, he would have turned and have taken to flight, but his clear eyes had met the dull and yet searching glance of the centurion, and, blushing at his own weakness, he stood still with his arms crossed, and proudly and defiantly awaited the Gaul who with his companion came straight up to him.

Talib had previously seen the youth by his father's side; he recognised him and asked how long he had been there, and if he had come direct from the mountain. Hermas answered him as was becoming, and understood at once that it was not he that the centurion was seeking.

Perfectly reassured and not without curiosity he looked at the new-comer, and a smile curled his lips as he observed that the lean old man, exhausted by his long and hurried ride, could scarcely hold himself on his beast, and at the same time it struck him that this pitiable old man was the husband of the blooming and youthful Sirona. Far from feeling any remorse for his intrusion into this man's house, he yielded entirely to the audacious humour with which his aspect filled him, and when Phœbius himself asked him as to whether he had not met on his way with a fair-haired woman and a limping grey-hound, he replied, repressing his laughter with difficulty,

"Aye, indeed! I did see such a woman

and her dog, but I do not think it was lame."

"Where did you see her?" asked Phœbicius hastily.

Hermas coloured, for he was obliged to tell an untruth, and it might be that he would do Sirona an injury by giving false information. He therefore ventured to give no decided answer, but enquired,

"Has the woman committed some crime that you are pursuing her?"

"A great one!" replied Talib, "she is my lord's wife, and—"

"What she has done wrong concerns me alone," said Phœbicius, sharply interrupting his companion. "I hope this fellow saw better than you who took the crying woman with a child, from Aila, for Sirona. What is your name, boy?"

"Hermas," answered the lad. "And who are you, pray?"

The Gaul's lips were parted for an angry reply, but he suppressed it and said,

"I am the emperor's centurion, and I ask you, what did the woman look like whom you saw, and where did you meet her?"

The soldier's fierce looks, and his captain's words showed Hermas that the fugitive woman had nothing good to expect if she were caught, and as he was not in the least inclined to assist her pursuers he hastily replied, giving the reins to his audacity, "I at any rate did not meet the person whom you seek; the woman I saw is certainly not this man's wife, for she might very well be his grand-daughter. She had gold hair, and a rosy face, and the greyhound that followed her was called Iambe."

"Where did you meet her?" shrieked the centurion.

"In the fishing-village at the foot of the mountain," replied Hermas. "She got into a boat, and away it went!"

"Towards the north?" asked the Gaul.

"I think so," replied Hermas, "but I do not know, for I was in a hurry, and could not look after her."

"Then we will try to take her in Klysma," cried Phœbicius to the Amalekite. "If only there were horses in this accursed desert!"

"It is four days' journey," said Talib considering. "And beyond Elim there is no water before the Wells of Moses. Certainly if we could get good dromedaries—"

"And if," interrupted Hermas, "it were not better that you, my lord centurion, should not go so far from the oasis. For over there they say that the Blemmyes are gathering, and I myself am going across as a spy so soon as it is dark."

Phœbicius looked down gloomily considering the matter. The news had reached him too that the sons of the desert were preparing for a new incursion, and he cried to Talib angrily but decidedly, as he turned his back upon Hermas, "You must ride alone to Klysma, and try to capture her. I cannot and will not neglect my duty for the sake of the wretched woman."

Hermas looked after him as he went away,

and laughed out loud when he saw him disappear into his inn. He hired a boat from the old man for his passage across the sea for one of the gold-pieces given him by Paulus, and lying down on the nets he refreshed himself by a deep sleep of some hours' duration. When the moon rose he was roused in obedience to his orders, and helped the boy who accompanied him, and who understood the management of the sails and rudder, to push the boat, which was laid up on the sand, down into the sea. Soon he was flying over the smooth and glistening waters before a light wind, and he felt as fresh and strong in spirit as a young eagle that has just left the nest, and spreads its mighty wings for the first time. He could have shouted in his new and delicious sense of freedom, and the boy at the stern shook his head in astonishment when he saw Hermas wield the oars he had entrusted to him, unskilfully it is true, but with mighty strokes.

"The wind is in our favour," he called out to the anchorite as he hauled round the sail

with the rope in his hand, "we shall get on without your working so hard. You may save your strength."

"There is plenty of it, and I need not be stingy of it," answered Hermas, and he bent forward for another powerful stroke.

About half-way he took a rest, and admired the reflection of the moon in the bright mirror of the water, and he could not but think of Petrus' court-yard that had shone in the same silvery light when he had climbed up to Sirona's window. The image of the fair, white-armed woman recurred to his mind, and a melancholy longing began to creep over him.

He sighed softly, again and yet again; but as his breast heaved for the third bitter sigh, he remembered the object of his journey and his broken fetters, and with eager arrogance he struck the oar flat on to the water so that it spurted high up, and sprinkled the boat and him with a shower of wet and twinkling diamond-drops. He began to work the oars again, reflecting as he did so, that he had

something better to do than to think of a woman. Indeed, he found it easy to forget Sirona completely, for in the next few days he went through every excitement of a warrior's life.

Scarcely two hours after his start from Raïthu he was standing on the soil of another continent, and, after finding a hiding-place for his boat, he slipped off among the hills to watch the movements of the Blemmyes. The very first day he went up to the valley in which they were gathering; on the second, after being many times seen and pursued, he succeeded in seizing a warrior who had been sent out to reconnoitre, and in carrying him off with him; he bound him, and by heavy threats learned many things from him.

The number of their collected enemies was great, but Hermas had hopes of outstripping them, for his prisoner revealed to him the spot where their boats, drawn up on shore, lay hidden under sand and stones.

As soon as it was dusk, the anchorite in his

boat went towards the place of embarkation, and when the Blemmyes, in the darkness of midnight, drew their first bark into the water, Hermas sailed off ahead of the enemy, landed in much danger below the western declivity of the mountain, and hastened up towards Sinai to warn the Pharanite watchmen on the beacon.

He gained the top of the difficult peak before sunrise, roused the lazy sentinels who had left their posts, and before they were able to mount-guard, to hoist the flags or to begin to sound the brazen cymbals, he had hurried on down the valley to his father's cave.

Since his disappearance Miriam had incessantly hovered round Stephanus' dwelling, and had fetched fresh water for the old man every morning, noon and evening, even after a new nurse, who was clumsier and more peevish, had taken Paulus' place. She lived on roots, and on the bread the sick man gave her, and at night she lay down to sleep in a deep dry cleft of the rock that she had long known well. She

quitted her hard bed before day-break to refill the old man's pitcher, and to chatter to him about Hermas.

She was a willing servant to Stephanus because as often as she went to him, she could hear his son's name from his lips, and he rejoiced at her coming because she always gave him the opportunity of talking of Hermas.

For many weeks the sick man had been so accustomed to let himself be waited on that he accepted the shepherdess's good offices as a matter of course, and she never attempted to account to herself for her readiness to serve him. Stephanus would have suffered in dispensing with her, and to her, her visits to the well and her conversations with the old man had become a need, nay a necessity, for she still was ignorant whether Hermas was yet alive, or whether Phœbicius had killed him in consequence of her betrayal. Perhaps all that Stephanus told her of his son's journey of investigation was an invention of Paulus to spare

the sick man, and accustom him gradually to the loss of his child; and yet she was only too willing to believe that Hermas still lived, and she quitted the neighbourhood of the cave as late as possible, and filled the sick man's water-jar before the sun was up, only because she said to herself that the fugitive on his return would seek no one else so soon as his father.

She had not one really quiet moment, for if a falling stone, an approaching footstep, or the cry of a beast broke the stillness of the desert she at once hid herself, and listened with a beating heart; much less from fear of Petrus her master, from whom she had run away, than in the expectation of hearing the step of the man whom she had betrayed into the hand of his enemy, and for whom she nevertheless painfully longed day and night.

As often as she lingered by the spring she wetted her stubborn hair to smoothe it, and washed her face with as much zeal as if she

thought she should succeed in washing the dark hue out of her skin. And all this she did for him, that on his return she might charm him as much as the white woman in the oasis, whom she hated as fiercely as she loved him passionately.

During the heavy storm of last night a torrent from the mountain height had shed itself into her retreat and had driven her out of it. Wet through, shelterless, tormented by remorse, fear and longing, she had clambered from stone to stone, and sought refuge and peace under first one rock and then another; thus she had been attracted by the glimmer of light that shone out of the new dwelling of the pious Paulus; she had seen and recognised the Alexandrian, but he had not observed her as he cowered on the ground near his hearth deeply sunk in thought.

She knew now where the excommunicated man dwelt after whom Stephanus often asked, and she had gathered from the old man's lamentations and dark hints, that Paulus too

had been ensnared and brought to ruin by her enemy.

As the morning-star began to pale Miriam went up to Stephanus' cave; her heart was full of tears, and yet she was unable to pour out her need and suffering in a soothing flood of weeping; she was wholly possessed with a wild desire to sink down on the earth there and die, and to be released by death from her relentless, driving torment. But it was still too early to disturb the old man—and yet—she must hear a human voice, one word—even if it were a hard word—from the lips of a human being; for the bewildering feeling of distraction which confused her mind, and the misery of abandonment that crushed her heart, were all too cruelly painful to be borne.

She was standing by the entrance to the cave when, high above her head, she heard the falling of stones and the cry of a human voice. She started and listened with outstretched neck and strung sinews, motionless. Then she broke suddenly into a loud and piercing shout of joy,

and flinging up her arms she flew up the mountain towards a traveller who came swiftly down to meet her.

“Hermas! Hermas!” she shouted, and all the sunny delight of her heart was reflected in her cry so clearly and purely that the sympathetic chords in the young man’s soul echoed the sound, and he hailed her with joyful welcome.

He had never before greeted her thus, and the tone of his voice revived her poor crushed heart like a restorative draught offered by a tender hand to the lips of the dying. Exquisite delight, and a glow of gratitude such as she had never before felt flooded her soul, and as he was so good to her she longed to show him that she had something to offer in return for the gift of friendship which he offered her. So the first thing she said to him was, “I have staid constantly near your father, and have brought him water early and late, as much as he needed.”

She blushed as she thus for the first

time praised herself to him, but Hermas exclaimed,

"That is a good girl! and I will not forget it. You are a wild, silly thing, but I believe that you are to be relied on by those to whom you feel kindly."

"Only try me," cried Miriam holding out her hand to him. He took it, and as they went on together he said,

"Do you hear the brass? I have warned the watchmen up there; the Blemmyes are coming. Is Paulus with my father?"

"No, but I know where he is."

"Then you must call him," said the young man. "Him first and then Gelasius, and Psoës, and Dulas, and any more of the penitents that you can find. They must all go to the castle by the ravine. Now I will go to my father; you hurry on and show that you are to be trusted." As he spoke he put his arm round her waist, but she slipped shyly away, and calling out, "I will take them all the message," she hurried off.

In front of the cave where she had hoped to meet with Paulus she found Sirona; she did not stop with her, but contented herself with laughing wildly and calling out words of abuse.

Guided by the idea that she should find the Alexandrian at the nearest well, she went on and called him, then hurrying on from cave to cave she delivered her message in Hermas' name, happy to serve him.

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## CHAPTER IX.

THEY were all collected behind the rough wall on the edge of the ravine—the strange men who had turned their back on life with all its joys and pains, its duties and its delights, on the community and family to which they belonged, and had fled to the desert, there to strive for a prize above and beyond this life, when they had of their own free will renounced all other effort. In the voiceless desert, far from the enticing echoes of the world, it might be easy to kill every sensual impulse, to throw off the fetters of the world, and so bring that humanity, which was bound to the dust through sin and the flesh, nearer to the pure and incorporate being of the Divinity.

All these men were Christians, and, like the Saviour who had freely taken torments upon Himself to become the Redeemer, they too

sought through the purifying power of suffering to free themselves from the dross of their impure human nature, and by severe penance to contribute their share of atonement for their own guilt, and for that of all their race. No fear of persecution had driven them into the desert—nothing but the hope of gaining the hardest of victories.

All the anchorites who had been summoned to the tower were Egyptians and Syrians, and among the former particularly there were many who, being already inured to abstinence and penance in the service of the old gods in their own country, now as Christians had selected as the scene of their pious exercises the very spot where the Lord must have revealed Himself to his elect.

At a later date not merely Sinai itself but the whole tract of Arabia Petræa—through which, as it was said, the Jews at their exodus under Moses had wandered—was peopled with Ascetics of like mind, who gave to their settlements the names of the resting-places of

the chosen people, as mentioned in the Scriptures; but as yet there was no connexion between the individual penitents, no order ruled their lives; they might still be counted by tens, though ere long they numbered hundreds and thousands.

The threat of danger had brought all these contemners of the world and of life in stormy haste to the shelter of the tower, in spite of their readiness to die. Only old Kosmas, who had withdrawn to the desert with his wife—she had found a grave there—had remained in his cave, and had declared to Gelasius, who shared his cave and who had urged him to flight, that he was content in whatever place or whatever hour the Lord should call him, and that it was in God's hands to decide whether old age or an arrow-shot should open to him the gates of Heaven.

It was quite otherwise with the rest of the anchorites, who rushed through the narrow door of the watch-tower and into its inner-room till it was filled to overflowing, and

Paulus, who in the presence of danger had fully recovered his equanimity, was obliged to refuse admission to a newcomer in order to preserve the closely-packed and trembling crowd from injury.

No murrain passes from beast to beast, no mildew from fruit to fruit with such rapidity as fear spreads from man to man.' Those who had been driven by the sharpest lashings of terror had run the fastest, and reached the castle first. They had received those who followed them with lamentation and outcries, and it was a pitiable sight to see how the terrified crowd, in the midst of their loud declarations of resignation to God's guidance and their pious prayers, wrung their hands, and at the same time how painfully anxious each one was to hide the little property he had saved first from the disapproval of his companions, and then from the covetousness of the approaching enemy.

With Paulus came Sergius and Jeremias to whom, on the way, he had spoken words of encouragement. All three did their utmost to revive the confidence of the terrified men, and

when the Alexandrian reminded them how zealously each of them only a few weeks since had helped to roll the blocks and stones from the wall, and down the precipice, so as to crush and slay the advancing enemy the feeling was strong in many of them that, as he had already proved himself worthy in defence, it was due to him now to make him their leader.

The number of the men who rushed out of the tower was increasing, and when Hermas appeared with his father on his back and followed by Miriam, and when Paulus exhorted his companions to be edified by this pathetic picture of filial love, curiosity tempted even the last loiterers in the tower out into the open space.

The Alexandrian sprang over the wall, went up to Stephanus, lifted him from the shoulders of the panting youth and, taking him on his own, carried him towards the tower; but the old warrior refused to enter the place of refuge, and begged his friend to lay him down by the wall. Paulus obeyed his wish and then went

with Hermas to the top of the tower to spy the distance from thence:

As soon as he had quitted him, Stephanus turned to the anchorites who stood near him, saying,

"These stones are loose, and though my strength is indeed small still it is great enough to send one of them over with a push. If it comes to a battle my old soldier's eyes, dim as they are now, may with the help of yours see many things that may be useful to you young ones. Above all things, if the game is to be a hot one for the robbers, one must command here whom the others will obey."

"It shall be you, father," interrupted Salathiel the Syrian. "You have served in Cæsar's army, and you proved your courage and knowledge of war in the last raid. You shall command us."

Stephanus sadly shook his head and replied, "My voice is become too weak and low since this wound in my breast and my long illness. Not even those who stand nearest to me would

understand me in the noise of battle. Let Paulus be your captain, for he is strong, cautious and brave."

Many of the anchorites had long looked upon the Alexandrian as their best stay; for many years he had enjoyed the respect of all and on a thousand occasions had given proof of his strength and presence of mind, but at this proposal they looked at each other in surprise, doubt and disapproval.

Stephanus saw what was passing in their minds.

"It is true he has erred gravely," he said. "And before God he is the least of the least among us; but in animal strength and indomitable courage he is superior to you all. Which of you would be willing to take his place, if you reject his guidance."

"Orion the Saïte," cried one of the anchorites, "is tall and strong. If he would—"

But Orion eagerly excused himself from assuming the dangerous office, and when Andreas and Joseph also refused with no less de-

cision the leadership that was offered them, Stephanus said,

“You see there is no choice left us but to beg the Alexandrian to command us here so long as the robbers threaten us, and no longer. There he comes—shall I ask him?”

A murmur of consent, though by no means of satisfaction, answered the old man, and Paulus, quite carried away by his eagerness to stake his life and blood for the protection of the weak, and fevered with a soldier's ardour, accepted Stephanus' commission as a matter of course, and set to work like a general to organise the helpless wearers of sheep-skin.

Some he sent to the top of the tower to keep watch, others he charged with the transport of the stones; to a third party he entrusted the duty of hurling pieces of rock and blocks of stone down into the abyss in the moment of danger; he requested the weaker brethren to assemble themselves together, to pray for the others and to sing hymns of praise, and he concerted signs and pass words with all; he

was now here, now there, and his energy and confidence infused themselves even into the faint-hearted.

In the midst of these arrangements Hermas took leave of him and of his father, for he heard the Roman war-trumpets and the drums of the young manhood of Pharan, as they marched through the short cut to meet the enemy. He knew where the main strength of the Blemmyes lay and communicated this knowledge to the Centurion Phœbicius and the captain of the Pharanites. The Gaul put a few short questions to Hermas, whom he recognised immediately, for since he had met him at the harbour of Raïthu he could not forget his eyes, which reminded him of those of Glycera; and after receiving his hasty and decided answers he issued rapid and prudent orders.

A third of the Pharanites were to march forward against the enemy, drumming and trumpeting, and then retreat as far as the watch-tower as the enemy approached over the

plain. If the Blemmyes allowed themselves to be tempted thither, a second third of the warriors of the oasis, that could easily lie in ambush in a cross-valley, were to fall on their left flank, while Phoebicius and his maniple—hidden behind the rock on which the castle stood—would suddenly rush out and so decide the battle. The last third of the Pharanites had orders to destroy the ships of the invaders under the command of Hermas, who knew the spot where they had landed.

In the worst case the centurion and his men could retreat into the castle, and there defend themselves till the warriors of the nearest seaports—whither messengers were already on their way—should come to the rescue.

The Gaul's orders were immediately obeyed, and Hermas walked at the head of the division entrusted to him, as proud and as self-possessed as any of Cæsar's veterans leading his legion into the field. He carried a bow and arrows at his back, and in his hand a battle-axe that he had bought at Raïthu.

Miriam attempted to follow the troops he was leading, but he observed her, and called out, "Go up to the fort, child, to my father." And the shepherdess obeyed without hesitation.

The anchorites had all crowded to the edge of the precipice, they looked at the division of the forces, and signed and shouted down. They had hoped that some part of the fighting men would be joined to them for their defence, but, as they soon learned, they had hoped in vain. Stephanus, whose feeble sight could not reach so far as the plain at the foot of the declivity, made Paulus report to him all that was going on there, and with the keen insight of a soldier he comprehended the centurion's plan. The troop led by Hermas passed by below the tower, and the youth waved and shouted a greeting up to his father. Stephanus, whose hearing remained sharper than his sight, recognised his son's voice and took leave of him with tender and loving words in as loud a voice as he could command. Paulus collected

all the overflow of the old man's heart in one sentence, and called out his blessings through his two hands as a speaking trumpet, after his friend's son as he departed to battle. Hermas understood; but deeply as he was touched by this farewell he answered only by dumb signs. A father can find a hundred words of blessing sooner than a son can find one of thanks.

As the youth disappeared behind the rocks, Paulus said,

"He marches on like an experienced soldier, and the others follow him as sheep follow a ram. But hark!—Certainly—the foremost division of the Pharanites and the enemy have met. The outcry comes nearer and nearer."

"Then all will be well," cried Stephanus excitedly. "If they only take the bait and let themselves be drawn on to the plateau I think they are lost. From here we can watch the whole progress of the battle, and if our side are driven back it may easily happen that they will throw themselves into the castle. Now not a pebble must be thrown in vain, for if our tower be-

comes the central-point of the struggle the defenders will need stones to fling."

These words were heard by several of the anchorites, and as now the war cries and the noise of the fight came nearer and nearer, and one and another repeated to each other that their place of refuge would become the centre of the combat, the frightened penitents quitted the posts assigned to them by Paulus, ran hither and thither in spite of the Alexandrian's severe prohibition, and most of them at last joined the company of the old and feeble, whose psalms grew more and more lamentable as danger pressed closer upon them.

Loudest of all was the wailing of the Saïte Orion who cried with uplifted hands,

"What wilt Thou of us miserable creatures, O Lord? When Moses left Thy chosen people on this very spot for only forty days, they at once fell away from Thee; and we, we without any leader have spent all our life in Thy service, and have given up all that can rejoice the heart, and have taken every kind of suffering

upon us to please Thee! and now these hideous heathen are surging round us again, and will kill us. Is this the reward of victory for our striving and our long wrestling?"

The rest joined in the lamentation of the Saïte, but Paulus stepped into their midst, blamed them for their cowardice, and with warm and urgent speech implored them to return to their posts so that the wall might be guarded at least on the eastern and more accessible side, and that the castle might not fall an easy prey into the hands of an enemy from whom no quarter was to be expected. Some of the anchorites were already proceeding to obey the Alexandrian's injunction, when a fearful cry, the war cry of the Blemmyes who were in pursuit of the Pharanites, rose from the foot of their rock of refuge.

They crowded together again in terror; Salathiel the Syrian, had ventured to the edge of the abyss, and had looked over old Stephanus' shoulder down into the hollow, and when he rushed back to his companions, crying in

terror, "Our men are flying!" Gelasius shrieked aloud, beat his breast, and tore his rough black hair, crying out,

"O Lord God, what wilt Thou of us? Is it vain then to strive after righteousness and virtue that Thou givest us over unto death, and dost not fight for us? If we are overcome by the heathen, ungodliness and brute force will boast themselves as though they had won the victory over righteousness and truth!"

Paulus had turned from the lamenting hermits, perplexed and beside himself, and stood with Stephanus watching the fight.

The Blemmyes had come in great numbers, and their attack, before which the Pharanites were to have retired as a feint, fell with such force upon the foremost division that they and their comrades, who had rushed to their aid on the plateau, were unable to resist it, and were driven back as far as the spot where the ravine narrowed.

"Things are not as they should be," said Stephanus.

"And the cowardly band, like a drove of cattle," cried Paulus in a fury, "leave the walls unprotected, and blaspheme God instead of watching or fighting."

The anchorites noticed his gestures, which were indeed those of a desperate man, and Sergius exclaimed,

"Are we then wholly abandoned? Why does not the thorn-bush light its fires, and destroy the evil-doers with its flames? Why is the thunder silent, and where are the lightnings that played round the peak of Sinai? Why does not darkness fall upon us to affright the heathen? Why does not the earth open her mouth to swallow them up like the company of Korah?"

"The Might of God," cried Dulas, "taries too long. The Lord must set our piety in a doubtful light, for He treats us as though we were unworthy of all care."

"And that you are!" exclaimed Paulus, who had heard the last words, and who was drag-

ging rather than leading the feeble Stephanus to the unguarded eastern wall. "That you are, for instead of resisting His enemies you blaspheme God, and disgrace yourselves by your miserable cowardice. Look at this sick old man who is prepared to defend you, and obey my orders without a murmur, or, by the holy martyrs, I will drag you to your posts by your hair and ears, and will—"

But he ceased speaking, for his threats were interrupted by a powerful voice which called his name from the foot of the wall.

"That is Agapitus," exclaimed Stephanus. "Lead me to the wall, and set me down there."

Before Paulus could accede to his friend's wish the tall form of the bishop was standing by his side.

Agapitus the Cappadocian had in his youth been a warrior; he had hardly passed the limits of middle age, and was a vigilant captain of his congregation. When all the youth of Pharan had gone forth to meet the Blemmyes, he

had no peace in the oasis, and, after enjoining on the presbyters and deacons that they should pray in the church for the fighting men with the women and the men who remained behind, he himself, accompanied by a guide and two acolytes, had gone up the mountain to witness the battle.

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To the other priests and his wife who sought to detain him, he had answered, "Where the flock is there should the shepherd be!"

Unseen and unheard he had gained the castle-wall and had been a witness to Paulus' vehement speech. He now stood opposite the Alexandrian with rolling eyes, and threateningly lifted his powerful hand as he called out to him:

"And dare an outcast speak thus to his brethren? Will the champion of Satan give orders to the soldiers of the Lord? It would indeed be a joy to you if by your strong arm you could win back the good name that your soul, crippled by sin and guilt, has flung away. Come

on, my friends! the Lord is with us and will help us."

Paulus had let the bishop's words pass over him in silence, and raised his hands like the other anchorites when Agapitus stepped into their midst, and uttered a short and urgent prayer.

After the "Amen" the bishop pointed out, like a general, to each man, even to the feeble and aged, his place by the wall or behind the stones for throwing, and then cried out with a clear ringing voice that sounded above all other noise, "Show to-day that you are indeed soldiers of the Most High."

Not one rebelled, and when man by man each had placed himself at his post, he went to the precipice and looked attentively down at the fight that was raging below.

The Pharanites were now opposing the attack of the Blemmyes with success, for Phœbius, rushing forward with his men from their ambush, had fallen upon the compact mass of the sons of the desert in flank and, spreading

death and ruin, had divided them into two bodies. The well-trained and well-armed Romans seemed to have an easy task with their naked opponents, who, in a hand to hand fight, could not avail themselves of either their arrows or their spears. But the Blemmyes had learned to use their strength in frequent battles with the imperial troops, and so soon as they perceived that they were no match for their enemies in pitched battle, their leaders set up a strange shrill cry, their ranks dissolved, and they dispersed in all directions, like a heap of feathers strewn by a gust of wind.

Agapitus took the hasty disappearance of the enemy for wild flight, he sighed deeply and thankfully and turned to go down to the field of battle, and to speak consolation to his wounded fellow Christians.

But in the castle itself he found opportunity for exercising his pious office, for before him stood the shepherdess whom he had already observed on his arrival, and she said with much embarrassment, but clearly and

quickly, "Old Stephanus there, my lord bishop—Hermas' father for whom I carry water—bids me ask you to come to him, for his wound has reopened and he thinks his end is near."

Agapitus immediately obeyed this call; he went with hasty steps towards the sick man, whose wound Paulus and Orion had already bound up, and greeted him with a familiarity that he was far from showing to the other penitents. He had long known the former name and the fate of Stephanus, and it was by his advice that Hermas had been obliged to join the deputation sent to Alexandria, for Agapitus was of opinion that no one ought to flee from the battle of life without having first taken some part in it.

Stephanus put out his hand to the bishop who sat down beside him, signed to the bystanders to leave them alone, and listened attentively to the feeble words of the sufferer. When he had ceased speaking, Agapitus said,

"I praise the Lord with you for having per-

mitted your lost wife to find the ways that lead to Him, and your son will be—as you were once—a valiant man of war. Your earthly house is set in order, but are you prepared for the other, the everlasting mansion?”

“For eighteen years I have done penance, and prayed, and borne great sufferings,” answered the sick man. “The world lies far behind me, and I hope I am walking in the path that leads to Heaven.”

“So do I hope for you and for your soul,” said the bishop. “That which it is hardest to endure has fallen to your lot in this world, but have you striven to forgive those who did you the bitterest wrong, and can you pray, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive them that sin against us?’ Do you remember the words, ‘If ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you?’”

“Not only have I pardoned Glycera,” answered Stephanus, “but I have taken her again into my heart of hearts; but the man who basely seduced her, the wretch, who although

I had done him a thousand benefits, betrayed me, robbed me and dishonoured me, I wish him—”

“Forgive him,” cried Agapitus, “as you would be forgiven.”

“I have striven these eighteen years to bless my enemy,” replied Stephanus, “and I will still continue to strive—”

Up to this moment the bishop had devoted his whole attention to the sick anchorite, but he was now called on all sides at once, and Gelasius, who was standing by the declivity with some other anchorites, called out to him,

“Father—save us—the heathen there are climbing up the rocks.”

Agapitus signed a blessing over Stephanus and then turned away from him, saying earnestly once more, “Forgive, and Heaven is open to you.”

Many wounded and dead lay on the plain, and the Pharanites were retreating into the

ravine, for the Blemmyes had not indeed fled, but had only dispersed themselves, and then had climbed up the rocks which hemmed in the level ground and shot their arrows at their enemies from thence.

“Where are the Romans?” Agapitus eagerly enquired of Orion.

“They are withdrawing into the gorge through which the road leads up here,” answered the Saïte. “But look! only look at these heathen! The Lord be merciful to us! they are climbing up the cliffs like woodpeckers up a tree.”

“The stones, fly to the stones!” cried Agapitus with flashing eyes to the anchorites that stood by. “What is going on behind the wall there? Do you hear? Yes—that is the Roman tuba. Courage, brethren! the Emperor’s soldiers are guarding the weakest side of the castle. But look here at the naked figures in the cleft. Bring the blocks here; set your shoulders stoutly to it, Orion! one more push, Salathiel! There it goes, it crashes down—If only

it does not stick in the rift! No! thank God, it has bounded off—that was a leap! Well done—there were six enemies of the Lord destroyed at once.”

“I see three more yonder,” cried Orion. “Come here, Damianus, and help me.”

The man he called, rushed forward with several others, and the first success raised the courage of the anchorites so rapidly and wonderfully that the bishop soon found it difficult to restrain their zeal, and to persuade them to be sparing with the precious missiles.

While, under the direction of Agapitus stone after stone was hurled clattering over the steep precipice down upon the Blemmyes, Paulus sat by the sick man, looking at the ground.

“You are not helping them?” asked Stephanus.

“Agapitus is right,” replied the Alexandrian. “I have much to expiate, and fighting brings

enjoyment. How great enjoyment I can understand by the torture it is to me to sit still. The bishop blessed you affectionately."

"I am near the goal," sighed Stephanus, "and he promises me the joys of Heaven if I only forgive him who stole my wife from me. He is forgiven—yes, all is forgiven him, and may everything that he undertakes turn to good; yea, and nothing turn to evil—only feel how my heart throbs, it is rallying its strength once more before it utterly ceases to beat. When it is all over repeat to Hermas everything that I have told you, and bless him a thousand, thousand times in my name and his mother's; but never, never tell him that in an hour of weakness she ran away with that villain—that man, that miserable man I mean—whom I forgive. Give Hermas this ring, and with it the letter that you will find under the dry herbs on the couch in my cave; they will secure him a reception from his uncle, who will also procure him a place in the army, for

my brother is in high favour with Cæsar. Only listen how Agapitus urges on our men; they are fighting bravely there; that is the Roman tuba. Attend to me—the maniple will occupy the castle and shoot down on the heathen from hence; when they come carry me into the tower. I am weak and would fain collect my thoughts, and pray once more that I may find strength to forgive the man not with my lips only.”

“Down there see—there come the Romans,” cried Paulus interrupting him. “Here, up here!” he called down to the men, “The steps are more to the left.”

“Here we are,” answered a sharp voice. “You stay there, you people, on that projection of rock, and keep your eye on the castle. If any danger threatens call me with the trumpet. I will climb up, and from the top of the tower there I can see where the dogs come from.”

During this speech Stephanus had looked down and listened; when a few minutes later the Gaul reached the wall and called out

to the men inside, "Is there no one there who will give me a hand?" he turned to Paulus, saying, "Lift me up and support me—quick!"

With an agility that astonished the Alexandrian, Stephanus stood upon his feet, leaned over the wall towards the centurion—who had climbed as far as the outer foot of it, looked him in the face with eager attention, shuddered violently, and repressing his feelings with the utmost effort offered him his lean hand to help him.

"Servianus!" cried the centurion, who was greatly shocked by such a meeting and in such a place, and who, struggling painfully for composure, stared first at the old man and then at Paulus.

Not one of the three succeeded in uttering a word; but Stephanus' eyes were fixed on the Gaul's features, and the longer he looked at him the hollower grew his cheeks and the paler his lips; at the same time he still held

out his hand to the other, perhaps in token of forgiveness.

So passed a long minute. Then Phœbicius recollected that he had climbed the wall in the Emperor's service, and stamping with impatience at himself he took the old man's hand in a hasty grasp. But scarcely had Stephanus felt the touch of the Gaul's fingers when he started as struck by lightning, and flung himself with a hoarse cry on his enemy who was hanging on the edge of the wall.

Paulus gazed in horror at the frightful scene, and cried aloud with fervent unction, "Let him go—forgive that Heaven may forgive you."

"Heaven! what is Heaven, what is forgiveness!" screamed the old man. "He shall be damned."

Before the Alexandrian could hinder him, the loose stone over which the enemies were wrestling in breathless combat gave way, and both were hurled into the abyss with the falling rock.

Paulus groaned from the lowest depth of his breast and murmured while the tears ran down his cheeks, "He too has fought the fight, and he too has striven in vain."

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## CHAPTER X.

THE fight was ended; the sun as it went to its rest behind the Holy Mountain had lighted many corpses of Blemmyes, and now the stars shone down on the oasis from the clear sky.

Hymns of praise sounded out of the church, and near it, under the hill against which it was built, torches were blazing and threw their ruddy light on a row of biers, on which under green palm-branches lay the heroes who had fallen in the battle against the Blemmyes.

Now the hymn ceased, the gates of the house of God opened and Agapitus led his followers towards the dead. The congregation gathered in a half-circle round their peaceful brethren, and heard the blessing that their pastor pronounced over the noble victims who

had shed their blood in fighting the heathen. When it was ended those who in life had been their nearest and dearest went up to the dead, and many tears fell into the sand from the eye of a mother or a wife, many a sigh went up to heaven from a father's breast. Next to the bier, on which old Stephanus was resting, stood another and a smaller one, and between the two Hermas knelt and wept. He raised his face, for a deep and kindly voice spoke his name.

"Petrus," said the lad, clasping the hand that the Senator held out to him, "I felt forced and driven out into the world, and away from my father—and now he is gone for ever how gladly I would have been kept by him."

"He died a noble death, in battle for those he loved," said the Senator consolingly.

"Paulus was near him when he fell," replied Hermas. "My father fell from the wall while defending the tower; but look here this girl—poor child—who used to keep your goats,

died like a heroine. Poor, wild Miriam, how kind I would be to you if only you were alive now!"

Hermas as he spoke stroked the arm of the shepherdess, pressed a kiss on her small, cold hand, and softly folded it, with the other across her bosom.

"How did the girl get into the battle with the men?" asked Petrus. "But you can tell me that in my own house. Come and be our guest as long as it pleases you, and until you go forth into the world; thanks are due to you from us all."

Hermas blushed and modestly declined the praises which were showered on him on all sides as the saviour of the oasis. When the wailing women appeared he knelt once more at the head of his father's bier, cast a last loving look at Miriam's peaceful face, and then followed his host.

The man and boy crossed the court together. Hermas involuntarily glanced up at the window where more than once he had seen

Sirona, and said, as he pointed to the centurion's house, "He too fell."

Petrus nodded and opened the door of his house. In the hall, which was lighted up, Dorothea came hastily to meet him, asking, "No news yet of Polykarp?"

Her husband shook his head, and she added, "How indeed is it possible? He will write at the soonest from Klysma or perhaps even from Alexandria.

"That is just what I think," replied Petrus, looking down to the ground. Then he turned to Hermas and introduced him to his wife.

Dorothea received the young man with warm sympathy; she had heard that his father had fallen in the fight, and how nobly he too had distinguished himself. Supper was ready, and Hermas was invited to share it. The mistress gave her daughter a sign to make preparations for their guest, but Petrus detained Marthana, and said, "Hermas may fill Antonius' place; he has still something to do with some of the workmen. Where are Jethro and the house-slaves?"

"They have already eaten," said Dorothea.

The husband and wife looked at each other, and Petrus said with a melancholy smile, "I believe they are up on the mountain."

Dorothea wiped a tear from her eye as she replied, "They will meet Antonius there. If only they could find Polykarp! And yet I honestly say—not merely to comfort you—it is most probable that he has not met with any accident in the mountain gorges, but has gone to Alexandria to escape the memories that follow him here at every step.—Was not that the gate?"

She rose quickly and looked into the court, while Petrus, who had followed her, did the same, saying with a deep sigh, as he turned to Marthana—who, while she offered meat and bread to Hermas was watching her parents—"It was only the slave Anubis."

For some time a painful silence reigned round the large table, to-day so sparsely furnished with guests.

At last Petrus turned to his guest and said,

"You were to tell me how the shepherdess Miriam lost her life in the struggle. She had run away from our house—"

"Up the mountain," added Hermas. "She supplied my poor father with water like a daughter."

"You see, mother," interrupted Marthana, "she was not bad-hearted; I always said so."

"This morning," continued Hermas, nodding in sad assent to the maiden, "she followed my father to the castle, and immediately after his fall, Paulus told me, she rushed away from it, but only to seek me and to bring me the sad news. We had known each other a long time, for years she had watered her goats at our well, and while I was still quite a boy and she a little girl, she would listen for hours when I played on my willow-pipe the songs which Paulus had taught me. As long as I played she was perfectly quiet, and when I ceased she wanted to hear more and still more, until I had had too much of it and went away. Then she would grow angry, and if I would not do her

will she would scold me with bad words. But she always came again, and as I had no other companion and she was the only creature who cared to listen to me, I was very well content that she should prefer our well to all the others. Then we grew older and I began to be afraid of her, for she would talk in such a godless way—and she even died a heathen. Paulus, who once overheard us, warned me against her, and as I had long thrown away the pipe and hunted beasts with my bow and arrow whenever my father would let me, I was with her for shorter intervals when I went to the well to draw water, and we became more and more strangers; indeed, I could be quite hard to her. Only once after I came back from the capital something happened—but that I need not tell you. The poor child was so unhappy at being a slave, and no doubt had first seen the light in a free house.

“She was fond of me, more than a sister is of a brother—and when my father was dead she felt that I ought not to learn the news from

any one but herself. She had seen which way I had gone with the Pharanites and followed me up, and she soon found me, for she had the eyes of a gazelle and the ears of a startled bird. It was not this time difficult to find me, for when she sought me we were fighting with the Blemmyes in the green hollow that leads from the mountain to the sea. They roared with fury like wild beasts, for before we could get to the sea the fishermen in the little town below had discovered their boats, which they had hidden under sand and stones, and had carried them off to their harbour. The boy from Raïthu who accompanied me, had by my orders kept them in sight, and had led the fishermen to the hiding place. The watchmen whom they had left with the boats had fled, and had reached their companions who were fighting round the castle, and at least two hundred of them had been sent back to the shore to recover possession of the boats and to punish the fishermen. This troop met us in the green valley, and there we fell to fighting.

"The Blemmyes outnumbered us; they soon surrounded us before and behind, on the right side and on the left, for they jumped and climbed from rock to rock like mountain-goats and then shot down their reed-arrows from above. Three or four touched me, and one pierced my hair and remained hanging in it with the feather at the end of the shaft.

"How the battle went elsewhere I cannot tell you, for the blood mounted to my head, and I was only conscious that I myself snorted and shouted like a madman and wrestled with the heathen now here and now there, and more than once lifted my axe to cleave a skull. At the same time I saw a part of our men turn to fly, and I called them back with furious words; then they turned round and followed me again.

"Once, in the midst of the struggle, I saw Miriam too, clinging pale and trembling to a rock and looking on at the fight. I shouted to her to leave the spot, and go back to my father, but she stood still and shook her head with a

gesture—a gesture so full of pity and anguish—I shall never forget it. With hands and eyes she signed to me that my father was dead, and I understood; at least I understood that some dreadful misfortune had happened. I had no time for reflection, for before I could gain any certain information by word of mouth, a captain of the heathen had seized me, and we came to a life and death struggle before Miriam's very eyes. My opponent was strong, but I showed the girl—who had often taunted me for being a weakling because I obeyed my father in everything—that I need yield to no one. I could not have borne to be vanquished before her and I flung the heathen to the ground and slew him with my axe. I was only vaguely conscious of her presence, for during my severe struggle I could see nothing but my adversary. But suddenly I heard a loud scream, and Miriam sank bleeding close before me. While I was kneeling over his comrade one of the Blemmyes had crept up to me, and had flung his lance at me from a few paces off. But Miriam—Miriam—”

"She saved you at the cost of her own life," said Petrus completing the lad's sentence, for at the recollection of the occurrence his voice had failed and his eyes overflowed with tears.

Hermas nodded assent, and then added softly,

"She threw up her arms and called my name as the spear struck her. The eldest son of Obedianus punished the heathen that had done it, and I supported her as she fell dying and took her curly head on my knees and spoke her name; she opened her eyes once more, and spoke mine softly and with indescribable tenderness. I had never thought that wild Miriam could speak so sweetly, I was overcome with terrible grief, and kissed her eyes and her lips. She looked at me once more with a long, wide-open, blissful gaze, and then she was dead."

"She was a heathen," said Dorothea, drying her eyes, "but for such a death the Lord will forgive her much."

"I loved her dearly," said Marthana, "and will lay my sweetest flowers on her grave. May I cut some sprays from your blooming myrtle for a wreath?"

"To-morrow, to-morrow, my child," replied Dorothea. "Now go to rest; it is already very late."

"Only let me stay till Antonius and Jethro come back," begged the girl:

"I would willingly help you to find your son," said Hermas, "and if you wish I will go to Raïthu and Klysma, and enquire among the fishermen. Had the centurion—" and as he spoke the young soldier looked down in some embarrassment, "had the centurion found his fugitive wife of whom he was in pursuit with Talib, the Amalekite, before he died?"

"Sirona has not yet reappeared," replied Petrus, "and perhaps—but just now you mentioned the name of Paulus, who was so dear to you and your father. Do you know that it was he who so shamelessly ruined the domestic peace of the centurion?"

"Paulus!" cried Hermas. "How can you believe it?"

"Phœbicius found his sheep-skin in his wife's room," replied Petrus gravely. "And the impudent Alexandrian recognised it as his own before us all and allowed the Gaul to punish him. He committed the disgraceful deed the very evening that you were sent off to gain intelligence."

"And Phœbicius flogged him?" cried Hermas beside himself. "And the poor fellow bore this disgrace and your blame, and all—all for my sake. Now I understand what he meant! I met him after the battle and he told me that my father was dead. When he parted from me, he said he was of all sinners the greatest, and that I should hear it said down in the oasis. But I know better; he is great-hearted and good, and I will not bear that he should be disgraced and slandered for my sake." Hermas had sprung up with these words, and as he met the astonished gaze of his hosts, he tried to collect himself, and said,

"Paulus never even saw Sirona, and I repeat it, if there is a man who may boast of being good and pure and quite without sin, it is he. For me, and to save me from punishment and my father from sorrow, he owned a sin that he never committed. Such a deed is just like him—the brave—faithful friend! But such shameful suspicion and disgrace shall not weigh upon him a moment longer!"

"You are speaking to an older man," said Petrus angrily interrupting the youth's vehement speech. "Your friend acknowledged with his own lips—"

"Then he told a lie out of pure goodness," Hermas insisted. "The sheep-skin that the Gaul found was mine. I had gone to Sirona, while her husband was sacrificing to Mithras, to fetch some wine for my father, and she allowed me to try on the centurion's armour; when he unexpectedly returned I leaped out into the street and forgot that luckless sheep-skin. Paulus met me as I fled, and said he would set it all right, and sent me away—to take my place and save

my father a great trouble. Look at me as severely as you will, Dorothea, but it was only in thoughtless folly that I slipped into the Gaul's house that evening, and by the memory of my father—of whom Heaven has this day bereft me—I swear that Sirona only amused herself with me as with a boy, a child, and even refused to let me kiss her beautiful golden hair. As surely as I hope to become a warrior, and as surely as my father's spirit hears what I say, the guilt that Paulus took upon himself was never committed at all, and when you condemned Sirona you did an injustice, for she never broke her faith to her husband for me, nor still less for Paulus."

Petrus and Dorothea exchanged a meaning glance, and Dorothea said,

"Why have we to learn all this from the lips of a stranger? It sounds very extraordinary, and yet how simple! Aye, husband, it would have become us better to guess something of this than to doubt Sirona. From the first it certainly seemed to me impossible that that

handsome woman, for whom quite different people had troubled themselves should err for this queer beggar—”

“What cruel injustice has fallen on the poor man!” cried Petrus. “If he had boasted of some noble deed, we should indeed have been less ready to give him credence.”

“We are suffering heavy punishment,” sighed Dorothea, “and my heart is bleeding. Why did you not come to us, Hermas, if you wanted wine? How much suffering would have been spared if you had!”

The lad looked down, and was silent; but soon he recollected himself, and said eagerly,

“Let me go and seek the hapless Paulus; I return you thanks for your kindness but I cannot bear to stay here any longer. I must go back to the mountain.”

The Senator and his wife did not detain him, and when the court-yard-gate had closed upon him a great stillness reigned in Petrus’ sitting-room. Dorothea leaned far back in her

señt and sat looking in her lap while the tears rolled over her cheeks; Marthana held her hand and stroked it, and the Senator stepped to the window and sighed deeply as he looked down into the dark court. Sorrow lay on all their hearts like a heavy leaden burden. All was still in the spacious room, only now and then a loud, long-drawn cry of the wailing women rang through the quiet night and reached them through the open window; it was a heavy hour, rich in vain, but silent self-accusation, in anxiety, and short prayers; poor in hope or consolation.

Presently Petrus heaved a deep sigh, and Dorothea rose to go up to him and to say to him some sincere word of affection; but just then the dogs in the yard barked, and the agonised father said softly—in deep dejection, and prepared for the worst,

“Most likely it is they.”

The deaconess pressed his hand in hers, but drew back when a light tap was heard at the court-yard-gate.

"It is not Jethro and Antonius," said Petrus, "they have a key."

Marthana had gone up to him, and she clung to him as he leaned far out of the window and called to whoever it was that had tapped,

"Who is that knocking?"

The dogs barked so loud that neither the Senator nor the women were able to hear the answer which seemed to be returned.

"Listen to Argus," said Dorothea, "he never howls like that, but when you come home or one of us, or when he is pleased."

Petrus laid his finger on his lips and sounded a clear, shrill whistle, and as the dogs, obedient to this signal, were silent, he once more called out,

"Whoever you may be, say plainly who you are, that I may open the gate."

They were kept waiting some few minutes for the answer, and the Senator was on the point of repeating his enquiry, when a gentle

voice timidly came from the gate to the window, saying,

"It is I, Petrus, the fugitive Sirona." Hardly had the words tremulously pierced the silence, when Marthana broke from her father, whose hand was resting on her shoulder, and flew out of the door, down the steps and out to the gate.

"Sirona; poor, dear Sirona," cried the girl as she pushed back the bolt; as soon as she had opened the door and Sirona had entered the court, she threw herself on her neck, and kissed and stroked her as if she were her long lost sister found again; then, without allowing her to speak, she seized her hand and drew her—in spite of the slight resistance she offered—with many affectionate exclamations up the steps and into the sitting-room. Petrus and Dorothea met her on the threshold, and the latter pressed her to her heart, kissed her forehead and said, "Poor woman; we know now that we have done you an injustice, and will try to make it good." The Senator too went

up to her, took her hand and added his greetings to those of his wife, for he knew not whether she had as yet heard of her husband's end.

Sirona could not find a word in reply. She had expected to be expelled as a cast-away when she came down the mountain, losing her way in the darkness. Her sandals were cut by the sharp rocks, and hung in strips to her bleeding feet, her beautiful hair was tumbled by the night-wind, and her white robe looked like a ragged beggar's garment, for she had torn it to make bandages for Polykarp's wound.

Some hours had already passed since she had left her patient—her heart full of dread for him and of anxiety as to the hard reception she might meet with from his parents.

How her hand shook with fear of Petrus and Dorothea as she raised the brazen knocker of the Senator's door, and now—a father, a mother, a sister opened their arms to her, and an affectionate home smiled upon her. Her heart

and soul overflowed with boundless emotion and unlimited thankfulness, and weeping loudly, she pressed her clasped hands to her breast.

But she spared only a few moments for the enjoyment of these feelings of delight, for there was no happiness for her without Polykarp, and it was for his sake that she had undertaken this perilous night journey. Marthana had tenderly approached her, but she gently put her aside, saying, "Not just now, dear girl. I have already wasted an hour, for I lost my way in the ravines. Get ready Petrus to come back to the mountain with me at once, for—but do not be startled Dorothea, Paulus says that the worst danger is over, and if Polykarp—"

"For God's sake, do you know where he is?" cried Dorothea, and her cheeks crimsoned while Petrus turned pale, and, interrupting her, asked in breathless anxiety, "Where is Polykarp, and what has happened to him?"

"Prepare yourself to hear bad news," said Sirona, looking at the pair with mournful anxiety

as if to crave their pardon for the evil tidings she was obliged to bring. "Polykarp had a fall on a sharp stone and so wounded his head. Paulus brought him to me this morning before he set out against the Blemmyes, that I might nurse him. I have incessantly cooled his wound, and towards mid-day he opened his eyes and knew me again, and said you would be anxious about him. After sundown he went to sleep, but he is not wholly free from fever, and as soon as Paulus came in I set out to quiet your anxiety and to entreat you to give me a cooling potion, that I may return to him with it at once." The deepest sorrow sounded in Sirona's accents as she told her story, and tears had started to her eyes as she related to the parents what had befallen their son. Petrus and Dorothea listened as to a singer, who, dressed indeed in robes of mourning, nevertheless sings a lay of return and hope to a harp wreathed with flowers.

"Quick, quick, Marthana," cried Dorothea eagerly and with sparkling eyes, before Sirona

had ended. "Quick, the basket with the bandages. I will mix the fever-draught myself." Petrus went up to the Gaulish woman.

"It is really no worse than you represent?" he asked in a low voice. "He is alive? and Paulus—"

"Paulus says," interrupted Sirona, "that with good nursing the sick man will be well in a few weeks."

"And you can lead me to him?"

"I—oh, alas! alas!" Sirona cried, striking her hand against her forehead. "I shall never succeed in finding my way back, for I noticed no waymarks! But stay— Before us a penitent from Memphis, who has been dead a few weeks—"

"Old Serapion?" asked Petrus.

"That was his name," exclaimed Sirona. "Do you know his cave?"

"How should I?" replied Petrus. "But perhaps Agapitus—"

"The spring where I got the water to cool

Polykarp's wound, Paulus calls the partridge's-spring."

"The partridge's-spring," repeated the Senator, "I know that." With a deep sigh he took his staff, and called to Dorothea,

"Do you prepare the draught, the bandages, torches, and your good litter, while I knock at our neighbour Magadon's door, and ask him to lend us slaves."

"Let me go with you," said Marthana.

"No, no; you stay here with your mother."

"And do you think that I can wait here?" asked Dorothea. "I am going with you."

"There is much here for you to do," replied Petrus evasively, "and we must climb the hill quickly."

"I should certainly delay you," sighed the mother, "but take the girl with you; she has a light and lucky hand."

"If you think it best," said the Senator, and he left the room.

While the mother and daughter prepared

everything for the night-expedition, and came and went, they found time to put many questions and say many affectionate words to Sirona. Marthana, even without interrupting her work, set food and drink for the weary woman on the table by which she had sunk on a seat; but she hardly moistened her lips.

When the young girl showed her the basket that she had filled with medicine and linen-bandages, with wine and pure water, Sirona said, "Now lend me a pair of your strongest sandals, for mine are all torn, and I cannot follow the men without shoes, for the stones are sharp, and cut into the flesh."

Marthana now perceived for the first time the blood on her friend's feet, she quickly took the lamp from the table and placed it on the pavement, exclaiming, as she knelt down in front of Sirona and took her slender white feet in her hand to look at the wounds on the soles,

"Good Heavens! here are three deep cuts!"

In a moment she had a basin at hand, and was carefully bathing the wounds in Sirona's feet; while she was wrapping the injured foot in strips of linen Dorothea came up to them.

"I would," she said, "that Polykarp were only here now, this roll would suffice to bind you both." A faint flush overspread Sirona's cheeks, but Dorothea was suddenly conscious of what she had said, and Marthana gently pressed her friend's hand.

When the bandage was securely fixed, Sirona attempted to walk, but she succeeded so badly that Petrus, who now came back with his friend Magadon and his sons, and several slaves, found it necessary to strictly forbid her to accompany them. He felt sure of finding his son without her, for one of Magadon's people had often carried bread and oil to old Serapion and knew his cave.

Before the Senator and his daughter left the room he whispered a few words to his wife, and together they went up to Sirona.

"Do you know," he asked, "what has happened to your husband?"

Sirona nodded. "I heard it from Paulus," she answered. "Now I am quite alone in the world."

"Not so," replied Petrus. "You will find shelter and love under our roof as if it were your father's, so long as it suits you to stay with us. You need not thank us—we are deeply in your debt. Farewell till we meet again, wife. I would Polykarp were safe here, and that you had seen his wound. Come, Marthana, the minutes are precious."

When Dorothea and Sirona were alone, the deaconess said, "Now I will go and make up a bed for you, for you must be very tired."

"No, no!" begged Sirona. "I will wait and watch with you, for I certainly could not sleep till I know how it is with him." She spoke so warmly and eagerly that the deaconess gratefully offered her hand to her young friend. Then she said,

"I will leave you alone for a few minutes, for my heart is so full of anxiety that I must needs go and pray for help for him, and for courage and strength for myself."

"Take me with you," entreated Sirona in a low tone. "In my need I opened my heart to your good and loving God, and I will never more pray to any other. The mere thought of Him strengthened and comforted me, and now, if ever, in this hour I need His merciful support."

"My child, my daughter!" cried the deaconess, deeply moved; she bent over Sirona, kissed her forehead and her lips, and led her by the hand into her quiet sleeping-room.

"This is the place where I most love to pray," she said, "although there is here no image and no altar. My God is everywhere present and in every place I can find Him."

The two women knelt down side by side, and both besought the same God for the same mercies—not for themselves, but for another;

and both in their sorrow could give thanks—  
Sirona, because in Dorothea she had found a  
mother, and Dorothea, because in Sirona she  
had found a dear and loving daughter.

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## CHAPTER XI.

PAULUS was sitting in front of the cave that had sheltered Polykarp and Sirona, and he watched the torches whose light lessened as the bearers went farther and farther towards the valley. They lighted the way for the wounded sculptor, who was being borne home to the oasis, lying in his mother's easy litter, and accompanied by his father and his sister.

"Yet an hour," thought the anchorite, "and the mother will have her son again, yet a week and Polykarp will rise from his bed, yet a year and he will remember nothing of yesterday but a scar—and perhaps a kiss that he pressed on the Gaulish woman's rosy lips. I shall find it harder to forget. The ladder which for so many years I had laboured to construct, on which I had thought to scale Heaven, and which looked to me so lofty and so safe, there

it lies broken to pieces, and the hand that struck it down was my own weakness. It would almost seem as if this weakness of mine had more power than what we call moral strength, for that which it took the one years to build up, was wrecked by the other in a moment. In weakness only am I a giant."

Paulus shivered at these words, for he was cold. Early in that morning when he had taken upon himself Hermas' guilt he had abjured wearing his sheep-skin; now his body, accustomed to the warm wrap, suffered severely, and his blood coursed with fevered haste through his veins since the efforts, nightwatches, and excitement of the last few days. He drew his little coat close round him with a shiver and muttered, "I feel like a sheep that has been shorn in mid-winter, and my head burns as if I were a baker and had to draw the bread out of the oven; a child might knock me down, and my eyes are heavy. I have not even the energy to collect my thoughts for a prayer, of which I am in such sore need. My goal is

undoubtedly the right one, but so soon as I seem to be nearing it, my weakness snatches it from me, as the wind swept back the fruit-laden boughs which Tantalus, parched with thirst, tried to grasp. I fled from the world to this mountain, and the world has pursued me and has flung its snares round my feet. I must seek a lonelier waste in which I may be alone—quite alone with my God and myself. There, perhaps I may find the way I seek, if indeed the fact that the creature that I call “I,” in which the whole world with all its agitations in little finds room—and which will accompany me even there—does not once again frustrate all my labour. He who takes his Self with him into the desert, is not alone.”

Paulus sighed deeply and then pursued his reflections: “How puffed up with pride I was after I had tasted the Gaul’s rods in place of Hermas, and then I was like a drunken man who falls down stairs step by step. And poor Stephanus too had a fall when he was so near the goal! He failed in strength to

forgive, and the Senator who has just now left me, and whose innocent son I had so badly hurt, when we parted forgivingly gave me his hand. I could see that he did forgive me with all his heart, and this Petrus stands in the midst of life, and is busy early and late with mere worldly affairs."

For a time he looked thoughtfully before him, and then he went on in his soliloquy, "What was the story that old Serapion used to tell? In the Thebaïd there dwelt a penitent who thought he led a perfectly saintly life and far transcended all his companions in stern virtue. Once he dreamed that there was in Alexandria a man even more perfect than himself; Phabis was his name, and he was a shoemaker, dwelling in the White road near the harbour of Kibotos. The anchorite at once went to the capital and found the shoemaker, and when he asked him, 'How do you serve the Lord? How do you conduct your life?' Phabis looked at him in astonishment. 'I? well, my Saviour! I work early

and late, and provide for my family, and pray morning and evening in few words for the whole city.' Petrus, it seems to me, is such an one as Phabis; but many roads lead to God, and we—and I—"

Again a cold shiver interrupted his meditation, and as morning approached the cold was so keen that he endeavoured to light a fire. While he was painfully blowing the charcoal Hermas came up to him.

He had learned from Polykarp's escort where Paulus was to be found, and as he stood opposite his friend he grasped his hand, stroked his rough hair and thanked him with deep and tender emotion for the great sacrifice he had made for him when he had taken upon himself the dishonouring punishment of his fault.

Paulus declined all pity or thanks, and spoke to Hermas of his father and of his future, until it was light, and the young man prepared to go down to the oasis to pay the last honours to the dead. To his entreaty that

he would accompany him, Paulus only answered,

“No—no; not now, not now; for if I were to mix with men now I should fly asunder like a rotten wine-skin full of fermenting wine; a swarm of bees is buzzing in my head, and an ant-hill is growing in my bosom. Go now and leave me alone.”

After the funeral ceremony Hermas took an affectionate leave of Agapitus, Petrus, and Dorothea, and then returned to the Alexandrian, with whom he went to the cave where he had so long lived with his dead father.

There Paulus delivered to him his father's letter to his uncle, and spoke to him more lovingly than he had ever done before. At night they both lay down on their beds, but neither of them found rest or sleep.

From time to time Paulus murmured in a low voice, but in tones of keen anguish, “In vain—all in vain—” and again, “I seek, I seek—but who can show me the way?”

They both rose before day-break; Hermas

went once more down to the well, knelt down near it, and felt as though he were bidding farewell to his father and Miriam.

Memories of every kind rose up in his soul, and so mighty is the glorifying power of love that the miserable, brown-skinned shepherdess Miriam seemed to him a thousandfold more beautiful than that splendid woman who filled the soul of a great artist with delight.

Shortly after sunrise Paulus conducted him to the fishing-port, and to the Israelite friend who managed the business of his father's house; he caused him to be bountifully supplied with gold and accompanied him to the ship laden with charcoal, that was to convey him to Klysma.

The parting was very painful to him, and when Hermas saw his eyes full of tears and felt his hands tremble, he said, "Do not be troubled about me, Paulus; we shall meet again, and I will never forget you and my father."

"And your mother," added the anchorite.

"I shall miss you sorely, but trouble is the very thing I look for. He who succeeds in making the sorrows of the whole world his own—he whose soul is touched by a sorrow at every breath he draws—he indeed must long for the call of the Redeemer."

Hermas fell weeping on his neck and started to feel how burning the anchorite's lips were as he pressed them to his forehead.

At last the sailors drew in the ropes; Paulus turned once more to the youth. "You are going your own way now," he said. Do not forget the Holy Mountain, and hear this: Of all sins three are most deadly: To serve false gods, to covet your neighbour's wife, and to raise your hands to kill; keep yourself from them. And of all virtues two are the least conspicuous, and at the same time the greatest: Truthfulness and humility; practise these. Of all consolations these two are the best: The consciousness of wishing the right however much we may err and stumble through human weakness, and prayer."

Once more he embraced the departing youth, then he went across the sand of the shore back to the mountain without looking round.

Hermas looked after him for a long time greatly distressed, for his strong friend tottered like a drunken man, and often pressed his hand to his head which was no doubt 'as burning as his lips.

The young warrior never again saw the Holy Mountain or Paulus, but after he himself had won fame and distinction in the army he met again with Petrus' son, Polykarp, whom the emperor had sent for to Byzantium with great honour, and in whose house the Gaulish woman Sirona presided as a true and loving wife and mother.

After his parting from Hermas Paulus disappeared. The other anchorites long sought him in vain, as well as bishop Agapitus, who had learned from Petrus that the Alexandrian had been punished and expelled in innocence, and who desired to offer him pardon and con-

solation in his own person. At last, ten days after, Orion the Saïte found him in a remote cave. The angel of death had called him only a few hours before while in the act of prayer, for he was scarcely cold. He was kneeling with his forehead against the rocky wall and his emaciated hands were closely clasped over Magdalena's ring. When his companions had laid him on his bier his noble, gentle features wore a pure and transfiguring smile.

The news of his death flew with wonderful rapidity through the oasis and the fishing-town, and far and wide to the caves of the anchorites, and even to the huts of the Amalekite shepherds. The procession that followed him to his last resting-place stretched to an invisible distance; in front of all walked Agapitus with the elders and deacons, and behind them Petrus with his wife and family, to which Sirona now belonged. Polykarp, who was now recovering, laid a palm-branch in token of reconciliation on his grave, which was visited as a sacred spot by the many whose needs he had alleviated in secret,

and before long by all the penitents from far and wide.

Petrus erected a monument over his grave, on which Polykarp incised the words which Paulus' trembling fingers had traced just before his death with a piece of charcoal on the wall of his cave:

"Pray for me, a miserable man—for I was a man."

THE END.



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